

A FOUCAULTIAN GENEALOGY OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS'
PRODUCTION OF SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE ARTS STUDENT

by

AMY DAVIS SANFORD

(Under the Direction of Elizabeth St. Pierre)

ABSTRACT

This Foucaultian genealogical project examined the secondary English Language Arts standards of the Common Core State Standards, sponsored by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and 48 of the United States, in order to describe the school subject and the school student they enable as well as the conditions that enable those descriptions. Emerging from a network of adjacent forces, the practices and knowledge the Common Core English Language Arts Standards prescribe produce a neoliberal student subject to compete for college and career readiness in a 21st century global market.

INDEX WORDS: ELA, standards, Common Core State Standards, education reform, standards-based reform, education policy, literacy, Michel Foucault, genealogy

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Robert and Montine Davis, for a lifetime of unconditional love, support, and belief in me. You'll never know how thankful I am for you.

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CHAPTER 1

INADEQUATE ANSWERS AND NEW QUESTIONS

Introduction

“I don’t know why you don’t teach prop-uh gramm-uh any more. Why, I even see gramm-uh mistakes in the newspap-uh!” said the somewhat inebriated stranger sitting next to me at the bar when he overheard that I was a high school English teacher. The purpose of high school English seems to be a commonsense assumption for many people, as it surely was for this forthright fellow. A similar conversation occurs whenever I identify myself as an English teacher: “You’re an English teacher? Oh, I better be careful about how I talk, er, speak. Which is it?”

Although many in the American public seem to have strong opinions about the purpose and content of high school English, namely to teach “prop-uh gramm-uh” and read the same books they read with Ms. So-and-So years ago, many high school English teachers work in a discipline that has an ongoing identity crisis. For example, when my students were in elementary school, they spent part of each day doing “reading” and practicing “writing.” Current elementary school students have reading workshop and writing workshop. From upper elementary through middle school, my former students encountered a class called “reading” and a separate class called “language arts.” In high school, my former students took “literature and composition,” while today’s high school students take English language arts (ELA), the current official name for the discipline in the nation and my home state of Georgia. It seems we don’t know what to

call this “subject” we teach, and there is considerable disagreement about what actually should be taught if one is teaching “English.”

My discipline’s identity crisis extends into post-secondary education. First year college students often take a course called “First Year Seminar,” a euphemism for a freshman composition course. Even though current standards projects, including national and state efforts such as the Common Core State Standards¹ in the United States and the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)², refer to high school English as ELA, most of my high school students just called it English³, as do most people I know, including ELA teachers.

For twelve years I taught high school ELA. The courses I taught spanned every grade level from eighth to twelfth and included students of various abilities, backgrounds, and interests. Regardless of these students’ differences and despite my years of what Lortie (2002) referred to as an “apprenticeship of observation” (p. 61) with talented teachers in my past, many questions gnawed at my complacency and confidence about my teaching: What actually counts as high school ELA? Why are my students and I reading mostly literature published decades, even

¹ The National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) along with 48 states sponsored the development of the Common Core State Standards for math and ELA to ensure that students in those subjects are college and career ready. The NGA and CCSSO introduced the Standards on June 2, 2010, a year after the Common Core State Standards Initiative began. The most commonly used acronym for the Common Core State Standards is CCSS. For this dissertation, however, I have made the stylistic choice to refer to the Common Core State Standards as the Common Core or the Common Core ELA Standards.

² The Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) became Georgia’s state standards for public schools in 2004. The Common Core State Standards will replace the GPS in math and ELA beginning in the 2012-2013 school year.

³ Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, I use the acronym ELA in place of “English” to align with common usage in most current standards documents, particularly the Common Core State Standards.

centuries ago? What should students learn as a result of four years of high school ELA that they did not know before? What will high school ELA prepare students for, and how does it improve their lives in the present? Unfortunately, my students wrestled with the same questions.

A Student's Question

Years ago, my ninth graders were in the midst of some sort of activity, the details of which elude me now, but from out of the mostly quiet work, one intelligent but unmotivated student who was taking the class for the second time looked up at me and asked, "If I already know how to read and write, why do I need three more years of high school English?" That he had the question to begin with was troubling, but what was even more worrisome was that I did not have a convincing answer. Actually, I had to think for several seconds in order to formulate the following answer: "Well, you know, Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player who ever played the game, but he still practices every day with the team so he can continue to improve his performance in games. These classes you will take are meant to do the same for you." I don't know if this answer satisfied him, but I wasn't satisfied. Since that conversation, I've been thinking a great deal about how his question and my answer became possible.

My student's question reflects Sarason's (1990) assertion about students' troubling perceptions of learning:

That does not mean that children do not learn what others say they should learn, although it is obvious that a fair number do not. It means that what they learn (what tests measure) is not viewed by students with a sense of growth or achievement but as the overcoming of hurdles in a compulsory course, which when traversed presumably frees one to pursue one's real interests. (p. 160)

My student knew that he had already learned to read and write. Though ELA's purpose was not apparent to him, the fact that I could not articulate a convincing rationale reflected my own confusion about the purpose of the required four years of high school English Courses. Many times I heard students in my classes talk about how odd it was that they had lived in Georgia all their lives but had a higher grade in Spanish than in ELA. The purpose of Spanish class was clear: to learn to read, write, and speak Spanish. One might surmise that students think of English not so much as a language but as a subject. How odd English class must have seemed to my students who were native English speakers, especially when the content of ELA class, except for the literature they were asked to read, seemed to stay the same from year to year. Would Spanish class and students' perceptions of it have been different had the course been called Spanish language arts? While my students and I struggled with the *why* of it all, I also continued to worry about the day-to-day *what* and even the *how*. I was not alone in my struggle.

A Teacher's Frustration

I enjoy crossword puzzles as much as anyone, but I can't say that I would choose to spend my career preparing others to be successful solvers of crossword puzzles or other trivia games. Sometimes, though, that's exactly what our students in secondary ELA think we're doing – prodding them to learn trivia for future retrieval. Some years ago, when I was still a classroom teacher, I mentored a teacher candidate who was assigned to my high school ELA classroom. This young woman was an exceptionally insightful beginning teacher who reflected on her own practice in a way that belied her years of experience. After she graduated, she taught in a rather large rural school with a reputation for strong academics. The ELA department at the school had decided a few years earlier to develop a very specific and prescriptive curriculum guide. For each year, the curriculum delineated exactly what elements of grammar students should learn, what

kind of and how many compositions they should write, what literary terms they should know, and what texts they should read. The purpose of this curriculum was (a) to make sure that teachers understood what they were supposed to teach each year and (b) to create a logical flow for students from one year to the next without obvious and unnecessary redundancy. I knew the intent behind this curriculum because I had helped write it a few years earlier.

Teaching within this setting, my former student teacher decided that, even though the curriculum mandated that sophomores read Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, she would assign one of Shakespeare's comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, believing her students might find it more interesting. Her reasons for changing the curriculum were more than justified. She knew her students' interests, sensibilities, and senses of humor, and she also knew that they had already read a Shakespearean tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, the year before. When she approached the department chair with her rationale for reading the comedy, she was met with a steely defense of reading *Julius Caesar*. Her department chair asserted, "*Julius Caesar* is in the curriculum." No matter what argument my teacher candidate made, the department chair resisted.

Ultimately, after a series of point-counterpoint arguments, the department head's reasoning was whittled down to one underlying defense of the play: there are many allusions to it in other writing. In other words, the department chair's insistence on reading *Julius Caesar* boiled down to its value as "cultural literacy" (Hirsch, 1988). That is to say, students who have not read this play may not understand a reference in a magazine article or a crossword puzzle to "Et tu, Brutus?" My teacher candidate's students read *Julius Caesar*. If she had not feared losing her job, she probably would have just given the students a nice summary of the play, including the scenes most alluded to, and then read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Like my teacher candidate, I shared my students' concerns about why they were doing the things they did in ELA class. My primary daily focus, though, was on *what* they were learning and *how* I was teaching because that was what I felt I had some control over. As a relatively new teacher when I helped write that prescriptive curriculum, I was relieved that we were going to sit down together as a department and divvy up ELA for grades 9-12. Before this departmental meeting, I had struggled to know, regardless of what my students needed to know, what I was actually expected to teach them. There was no national curriculum or curricular mandate, and the state's curriculum at the time, the Georgia Quality Core Curriculum, was a laundry list of objectives. I based the content of what I taught on the following four influences in this order: (a) what I thought my students would need to know for the next year, (b) what I thought was expected based on what other teachers at the same grade level taught, (c) what books were available in the school's book room, and (d) what I remembered learning in high school. Writing a curriculum as a department allowed us each to contribute what we thought students in our respective grade levels should know and what skills they would need. What concerns me now, though, is that we simply achieved standardization. That is, we ensured that every teacher at every grade level taught the same concepts, skills, and texts. We had named *what* we should teach but made no effort to theorize seriously or meaningfully the *why* – or to *whom*. Similarly, each iteration of standards-based reform has told teachers what skills and knowledge they are expected to teach, although I do not know that standards provide students greater certainty about what they are supposed to learn and, more importantly, why.

A 2002 Phi Kappa Delta audit of Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum found they lacked depth and their objectives were too numerous for a student to meet within the time constraint of a school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2005, para. 3). As a result, the state developed

the Georgia Performance Standards, which have served as the mandated curriculum for all Georgia public schools since 2004. However, in August of 2010, Georgia and many other states adopted the newly developed and published Common Core State Standards for ELA and math. Acting on behalf of 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers began the Common Core State Standards Initiative in 2009, “to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce” (Common Core, 2010d, *About the Standards*). “Teachers, school administrators, and experts” developed math and ELA standards that were finalized after “national organizations representing, but not limited to, teachers, postsecondary educators (including community colleges), civil rights groups, English language learners, and students with disabilities” as well as the public provided feedback (Common Core, *About the Standards*). The National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers introduced the final draft of the Common Core State Standards on June 2, 2010, at Peachtree Ridge High School in Suwanee, Georgia.

Seeking Answers

Because the Common Core State Standards were developed and adopted by the majority of the states so quickly and easily, I determined to study the Common Core ELA Standards for the ninth through twelfth grades in order to identify the school subject and the school student they enable as well as the conditions that enable those descriptions. At the beginning of this project, I realized I knew little about the historical context of my own profession and discipline. More specifically, I knew almost nothing about the professional and political conversations that had shaped and continue to shape the discipline ELA. Granted, I did know some recent history of

standards-based reform products such as Georgia's Quality Basic Education Act⁴, Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum, the 2002 U.S. No Child Left Behind Act, and the Georgia Performance Standards. Even though I knew a great deal about the current political and professional conversations in ELA, I didn't have an historical context for how they were connected and shaped. I did understand that changes in policy had real effects on students. But even though I had spent twelve years watching the pendulum go back and forth, I had never considered the kind of students those policies produced. The questions guiding my research project then became (a) What are the conditions that made possible the Common Core State ELA Standards' descriptions of secondary ELA and the ELA student? (b) How do the Common Core State ELA Standards describe secondary ELA and the ELA student they enable?

Choosing Foucaultian Genealogy

For this research project, I used Michel Foucault's historical analytic, genealogy, chiefly because genealogy begins with a question in the present not about how something began but about how it functions now. Foucaultian genealogy is an historical analytic but does not approach history as the retelling of a linear narrative about an event or person. As summarized earlier, I knew the Common Core's immediate story. Instead, Foucault (1977) identified his genealogical approach as *effective history*. Unlike traditional history, the starting point for effective history's analysis is not, according to Foucault (1988), an originating event in the past but "a question posed in the present" (p. 262). In a traditional historical study, the historian seeks

⁴ Heeding the national call for academic standards, Georgia passed the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) in 1985, one of whose mandates was the creation of a state curriculum, the QCC. Although this curriculum was supposed to be revised every four years, no significant revision was accomplished until almost twenty years later in 2002 (Georgia Department of Education, 2005, "Curriculum Frequently Asked Questions," para. 11).

to discover the plot line, the narrative, of a past event with the beginning, the middle, and then the end of that event's story. For example, for this study I did not begin by asking how secondary ELA began. To ask that question would first assume that there was a beginning point, an origin that began with a person or an event that initiated the study of the English language as a discipline. The second assumption would be that a description of secondary ELA as it exists today is a logical product and progression, the end of a story. In short, the assumption in conventional historical analysis is that if I look to the past, I can find the beginning of the story that ends with the formation of ELA. In this study, I do not ask where or how ELA began or assume that its current existence is the end point of any narrative. Rather, I ask questions about how current standards function now, in the present, and also about the enabling conditions that made them possible.

Another reason I chose to use Foucaultian genealogy is that, in the words of Bové (1990), “[genealogy] shows how transformations have no causal or historical necessity; they are not ‘natural’” (p. 60). As I read the Common Core's introductory documents, I was surprised by how the move from individual states' ELA standards to the national Common Core ELA Standards was described as such a natural, commonsense progression. For example, the Common Core's introduction refers to its standards as “the next generation of K–12 standards” (Common Core, 2010a, p.1). The National Governors Association's description of the Common Core Standards as a “vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century” and as a “natural outgrowth of meeting the charge to define college and career readiness” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3) characterizes the standards as positive, commonsense, natural ways to make change. Even the Georgia Department of Education (2011a) declared the Common Core a “common sense next step from the Georgia Performance Standards” (para. 1), even though the department (2011b)

referred to the Georgia Performance Standards as its “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (para. 1). In other words, all the states that adopted the Common Core – and did so almost without question – saw its description of ELA and, consequently, the ELA student as natural, as the next commonsense description of both, despite their recent claims that their own standards were “guaranteed and viable.” Situated in the present, Foucaultian genealogical questions asking how something like ELA functions and how it became possible do not preclude an investigation of the past. Instead, still valuing and searching through the past, they disrupt attempts to present current descriptions of ELA and the ELA student as common-sense products of a natural, somewhat predictable, ever-improving chain of events – progress toward a more enlightened state. Mahon (1992) asserted that

Genealogy is history oriented toward the future. Nietzsche seeks possibilities for the enhancement of life by means of his genealogical studies. Foucault puts the same goal in terms of creating possibilities for no longer being, doing, thinking what we are, do, think. (p. 125)

Foucaultian genealogy disrupts what is seen as natural and disrupts commonsense descriptions of what doing ELA and being an ELA student means.

Foucaultian Genealogy as an Historical Analytic

Foucault used archaeology in three major works, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Order of Things* (1966), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1971), and he followed these archaeologies with two genealogies, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I* (1976) and *Discipline and Punish* (1977). Foucault’s work as well as the work of other theorists was a response to a rigid positivism that refused to acknowledge the failure of Enlightenment

humanism and its belief in the narrative of humanity's linear progress in the wake of World War II's atrocities.

Since the Vienna Circle introduced positivism in the early 20th century, it has become what Steinmetz (2005) called part of our "epistemological unconscious" (p. 109). Positivism is a theory of knowledge based on a "quest for certainty" (Dewey, 1929). Glesne (1999) explained that positivism "characterizes the world as made up of observable, measurable facts. Positivists assume that a fixed, measurable reality exists external to people" (p. 5). Ryan (2006) summarized positivism's treatment of this detached, impersonal knowledge as follows:

- What counts is the means (methodology) by which knowledge is arrived at. These means must be objective, empirical and scientific;
- Only certain topics are worthy of enquiry, namely those that exist in the public world;
- The relationship between the self and knowledge has been largely denied – knowledge is regarded as separate from the person who constructs it. The political is separate from the personal;
- Math, science and technical knowledge are given high status, because they are regarded as objective, separate from the person and the private world;
- Knowledge is construed as being something discovered, not produced by human beings. (pp. 15-16)

Within positivism, then, knowledge is objective, not to be produced but found. Foucault's work was anti-positivist as it disrupted rigid notions of linearity and beliefs in origins.

A Comparison of Archaeology and Genealogy

Foucault's historical work included three domains of analysis: archaeology, genealogy, and ethics (Prado, 2000). Davidson (1986) referred to archaeology and genealogy as "the two best-known key words of Foucault's so-called methodology" (p. 221). Both are historical analytics that differ from traditional historical analyses by rejecting inevitability and the ahistoricism of what are often considered natural or commonsense concepts. According to Prado (2000), the point of Foucault's archaeology and genealogy was to "retell the history of a discipline or institution or practice. He highlights and connects previously marginal and obscured elements and events, thereby presenting a very different picture of that discipline, institution, or practice" (p. 25). Each analytic accomplishes this retelling by exploring the discursive production of disciplines and what they enable.

Prado (2000) described archaeology as "the unearthing of abandoned frameworks and the comparing of them with presently dominant ones; it is the meticulous mapping of established and excavated frameworks with a view to understanding the means of their production and their operation" (p. 27). For example, in his archaeological work Foucault investigated the discourses of *madness*, *knowledge*, and *language* to learn what made the concepts possible. Bové (1990) wrote that

"Discourse" provides a privileged entry into the poststructuralist mode of analysis precisely because it is the organized and regulated, as well as the regulating and constituting, functions of language that it studies: its aim is to describe the surface linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of populations, and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of systems of thought. (p. 55)

Archaeology's goal, then, is to describe the "systems of rules, and their transformations, which make different kinds of statements possible" (Davidson, 1986, p. 222). In other words, archaeology explores how what is taken as true became possible. Prado (2000) also pointed to the role of discourse within each analytic as the subtle difference in genealogy and archaeology when he referred to the "shift from archaeological analysis, in which discourse is deemed to shape practice, to genealogical analysis, in which discourse and practice are deemed to shape one another" (p. 24).

Foucault's (1977/1980b) archaeology focused on the "analysis of local discursivities" (p. 85). Bové (1990) wrote that genealogy, on the other hand, tries to get hold of this power that crosses discourses and to show that it is, among other things, the power that makes possible and legitimate certain kinds of questions and statements. It is, in other words, the power to produce statements which alone can be judged "true" or "false" within the knowledge/power system that produces "truth" and its criteria within a culture. (p. 57)

Foucaultian genealogy, then, focuses on power both in terms of what makes certain discourses possible and in terms of what they have the power to produce. Davidson (1986) acknowledged how genealogy's focus on power as productive disrupts what is considered ahistorical: "[genealogy] shows rather that the origin of what we take to be rational, the bearer of truth, is rooted in domination, subjugation, the relationship of forces – in a word, power" (p. 225).

Foucault (1976/1990) explored the constitutive power of discourse in his first genealogy, *The History of Sexuality*. He made his purpose clear by saying that his aim is to examine the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy for more than a century, which speaks verbosely of its own silences, takes

great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function.

I would like to explore not only these discourses but also the will that sustains them and the strategic intention that supports them. (p. 8)

Foucault, rather than trace the history of reproduction or study the etymology of the word *sexuality*, explored sexuality's history with its current treatment. He then dispelled the notion that sexuality was constructed as something evil that led to a prudishness and vilification of sex. Foucault contended instead that "what is at issue, briefly, is the over-all 'discursive fact,' the way in which sex is 'put into discourse'" (p. 11). He explored how sex became normalized by being talked about and made an object of study and, ultimately, a science. That is to say, certain statements were taken as true about what sexuality is thus establishing normal sexuality. Saying what sexuality is constructed the normal and the perverse that is outside the accepted discourse of what normal sexuality is. This constructed discourse leading to normalization led to control:

Through the various discourses, legal sanctions against minor perversions were multiplied; sexual irregularity was annexed to mental illness; from childhood to old age, a norm of sexual development was defined and all the possible deviations were carefully described; pedagogical controls and medical treatments were organized; around the least fantasies, moralists, but especially doctors, brandished the whole emphatic vocabulary of abomination. (p. 36)

In this way sexuality was created through discourse that established the language by which to talk about it, and the subsequent categorization iterated assumptions and (re)produced discourses around sexuality.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977/1995) showed how discipline rather than punishment was constructed through the creation of the discourses of justice. Foucault began by showing how systems of justice function and then explored what made how they function possible, what their effects were, and what became hidden. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault introduced the concept *docile bodies* to describe bodies of prisoners as well as soldiers, factory workers, and students. Foucault defined a docile body as one "that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p. 136). The docile body is an effect of Foucault's notion of discipline as "a technology of power" (p. 194). Disciplines, such as ELA, wield power over the human body to change and improve it by controlling what the body does. This control is achieved "at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity; an infinitesimal power over the active body" (Foucault, p. 137). For example, ELA functions as a discipline by defining the practices of ELA and by producing docile bodies in teachers, students, and so on. The discourse of school requires students to discipline their bodies in the classroom by conforming to the limits of a school desk, by facing forward in the classroom, and, especially during class discussions, to sit in a group so they are visible and cannot hide behind another student as they could in a row of desks. In general, they are to discipline their bodies as the discourse of schooling demands. Foucault asserted that now "the judges of normality are present everywhere" (p. 304) in the guise of teachers, doctors, and social workers whose ability to observe, judge, and categorize normalizes certain subjects and practices. In short, *Discipline and Punish* demonstrates the discursive power of discipline as a means of production of a human subject such as the prisoner, the soldier, and the student.

Despite having similar goals, then, archaeology and genealogy have a different focus, particularly in terms of power. Foucault (1977/1980a) posited that

“Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements . . . “truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to the effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A régime of truth. (p. 133)

Davidson (1986) observed that the first line of that quotation was Foucault’s “own succinct retrospective interpretation of his archaeological method” (p. 221) while the second line was Foucault’s interpretation of “his genealogical method” (p. 221). Foucault’s archaeological works attempted to examine the production of truth by looking at the language within discourses and its role in the production of truth. His genealogies added an analysis of the productive and disciplinary effects of those discourses (Bové, 1990). Critiquing discourse’s disciplinary effect is the work of genealogy. In short, the focus of archaeology is on the relationship between truth and knowledge, and genealogy’s is on the relation between truth and power (St. Pierre, 2000).

As an historical analytic, then, Foucault’s genealogy is not completely different from archaeological work. Prado (2000) noted that “genealogy’s own importance is clearer than why Foucault himself found it important to shift his focus from archaeology to genealogy” (p. 30). Davidson (1986) pointed out that “genealogy does not so much displace archaeology as widen the kind of analysis to be pursued” (p. 227). Archaeology widens from “rendering problematic what is least questioned, by reconstructing the apparently obvious and natural as suspect” (Prado, 2006, p. 75) to genealogy where “we find truth, knowledge, and rationality reconceived as products of power” (p. 76). Perhaps more importantly, genealogy is an investigation of how we ourselves are produced. As Mahon (1996) wrote, “Genealogy is critique as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying” (p. 122). In this study, then, Foucaultian

genealogy investigates not only how the Common Core produces ELA and the ELA student but also how that production is taken as natural so as to enable the Common Core writers, the public, and even the students themselves to perceive the student as the acting rather than produced subject.

How Foucaultian Genealogy Functions

Foucaultian genealogy functions to explore the how and why by tracing lines of descent from the present to the events that made that existence possible. In this study I used Foucaultian genealogy to explore the statements that have been taken as true to produce ELA and the ELA student and trace the lines of descent from those statements to the events that made them possible. There is no blueprint, no recipe, for Foucaultian genealogy as a method; however, Foucault did provide some guidelines. The first, as I pointed out earlier, is to pose a question locally in the present. Foucault (1977/1980b) stated that genealogy is “based on a reactivation of local knowledges” (p. 85). Because nothing is more local than the body itself, Foucault (1977) asserted that the genealogist must “expose the body totally imprinted by history” (p. 148). According to Foucault, “the body is molded by a great many distinct régimes” (p. 153). For example, the body of the student and the practices available to it are the effect of the discourse of school, which describes the practices that count as students’. The Foucaultian genealogist’s challenge is to expose the imprinted, inscribed body and trace from it the lines of descent to events that made those prescriptive régimes possible.

Events are described differently within effective history and traditional history. Foucault (1977) explained events in this way:

“Effective” history, however, deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. Within “effective history,” an

event, consequently, is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked “other.” (p. 154)

In other words, Foucaultian genealogists seek events that are shifts in power disrupting the traditional historical lines of descent rather than events that fit into a narrowly interpreted progression or line of ascent. Bové (1990) noted that events, or changes in force relationships, can also be “transformations of other events” (p. 60). These events contribute to “an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers” (Foucault, 1977, p. 140). What this means is that history traced through lines of descent and events looks more like a network or web than a timeline of progressive causes and effects.

Once the genealogist draws the lines of descent to events, the genealogist then looks for an emergence, which Prado (2000) summarized as an “appearance or advent enabled by collisions of forces” (p. 37). Foucault (1977) took the word *emergence* from the German term *Entsehung*, which he defined as “the moment of arising” (p. 148). An emergence is what a network of events makes possible. Prado (2000) wrote that possibilities for what can emerge include “value-sets, institutions, such as representative government, disciplinary constructs like ‘human sexuality,’ and concepts such as that of inalienable rights and of historical inevitability” (p. 37). What emerges are the taken-for-granted concepts that seem ahistorical. Once something emerges, however, its history is not completed; it continues to become. According to Foucault (1977), emergences do not denote “the final term of an historical development” (p. 148). They indicate not an ending but a becoming. Prado (2000) posited that “what emerges and gains dominance is everything that orders our lives and which appears natural to us in those lives” (p.

37). For example, something like *education* and its commonsense value have a history and will continue to act and be acted upon by discourses that (re)describe and inscribe the bodies of human subjects they act upon and create.

Within a poststructuralist critique such as Foucault's genealogy, no concept is natural, and every concept has a history. Concepts like sexuality, discipline, and even education are commonsense notions, or at least their value seems commonsensical and thus goes unquestioned. For example, efforts at school reform are rarely, if ever, about the value of education because its value is taken as common sense. According to Nietzsche (2001),

whatever has *value* in the present world has it not in itself, according to its nature – nature is always value-less – but has rather been given, granted value, and *we* were the givers and the granters! Only we have created the world *that concerns human* beings. (p. 171)

Concepts such as education, ELA as a discipline, and literacy and their value did not always exist. They were discursively and materially produced.

These taken-for-granted concepts came into being, according to Foucaultian genealogy, when they became objects of knowledge. If nothing can be said about something, it does not exist (Foucault, 1971/1972). The taking up of truth statements about an object by a discourse and the creation of new discourses around truth statements about an object produce a “régime of truth,” which Foucault defined as “the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, 1977/1980a, p. 131). Whether or not something exists, though, is not the point of genealogy according to Rajchman (1985). What matters is that something like sexuality or madness, for example, is made an object by statements being made about it. In other words, how and why something comes to exist is as important as its existence.

Map

The next chapter is an analysis of the conditions that enabled the ELA Common Core Standards and their description of secondary ELA and the ELA student. In Chapter 3, I explain the Foucaultian concepts I used in my analysis of the Common Core Standards and the Common Core Standards documents, and then I describe the documents I analyzed. In Chapter 4, I share my findings about the school subject and the student the ELA Common Core Standards describe. Finally, in Chapter 5, I respond to my student who asked the question that was the catalyst for this project.

CHAPTER 2

THE QUIET REVOLUTION

On September 2, 2010, not quite two months after the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers introduced the final draft of the Common Core State Standards, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan addressed a leadership team of Achieve, Inc.'s American Diploma Project, a precursor to the Common Core State Standards. In his speech Secretary Duncan extolled the consortia responsible for creating assessments aligned with the new Common Core Standards and referred to the development and widespread adoption of the Common Core as "the quiet revolution" (Duncan, 2010a). Secretary Duncan's choice of words pointed to the seeming stealth, rapidity, and force with which the Common Core Standards came to exist and proliferate. Foucault (1977) referred to this kind of revolution as an emergence, "the moment of arising" (p. 148) that is "always produced through a particular stage of forces" (p. 149). As an analysis of emergence, Foucault's genealogy "must delineate this interaction [of the forces], the struggle against circumstances" (p. 149). My goal for this research project was to "delineate [the] interaction" that made the Common Core – quietly revolutionary or not – possible as the readily and widely accepted, present, commonsense description of secondary ELA and the ELA student in the United States.

The work of this chapter is to address the following research question: What are the conditions that made the Common Core State ELA Standards' descriptions possible? More specifically, how did the Common Core ELA Standards' description of a secondary ELA become thinkable? To address this question, I used Foucault's guideposts for genealogical work

– *lines of descent, emergence, and events* – first to disrupt the Common Core’s description of ELA as a discipline and of the ELA student as a human subject as natural and inevitable and, second, to delineate the forces that enabled the Common Core to emerge, or, in the words of Foucault (1977), to “leap from the wings to center stage” (p. 150).

Tracing Lines of Descent

Foucaultian genealogy dismisses not the importance of past events but the existence of a single past event that is the origin of seemingly eternal or commonsense notions such as *literacy, literate, student, text, reading, or writing*. Davidson (1986) wrote that “as any reader of Foucault learns, [genealogy] shows rather that the origin of what we take to be rational, the bearer of truth, is rooted in domination, subjugation, the relationship of forces – in a word, power” (p. 225). Foucaultian genealogists identify events that function to make the local and present possible within a network of power, a “complex network of acts of domination, submission, and resistance” (Prado, 2000, p. 37). Because power functions within a network from which emerges a concept such as ELA or even “the literate individual” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7), the intersections of the lines of descent within that network are Foucault’s (1977) events, which he uniquely defined as “the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations” (p. 146). Meadmore, Hatcher, and McWilliam (2000), researchers who used Foucaultian genealogy as an historical analytic in their work, wrote that

what is important is that a line of descent should be drawn to the emergences, the discontinuities, and the events closest to the “problem of the present” under investigation. These should guide the enquiry, rather than the arbitrary use of historical time frames or historical dates. (p. 466)

Tracing the lines of descent to discontinuities disrupts the assumption that an object of knowledge (e.g., ELA, the “literate individual”) is natural and rational rather than historical and contingent. As I explained in Chapter 1, many developers and stakeholders describe the Common Core Standards to be a natural, commonsense next step in an ever-improving progression of standards-based ELA reform. Bové (1990) asserted that “[genealogy] shows how transformations have no causal or historical necessity; they are not ‘natural’” (p. 60). Disrupting what is perceived as natural, then, is the point of Foucaultian genealogy. To disrupt the Common Core as natural and explore what made it possible, I sought the historical discontinuities and, in the words of Bové, “the adjacency of events, that is, their simultaneity within ostensibly different fields” that “can transform entire domains of knowledge production” (p. 60).

To determine what events made the Common Core possible, I traced lines of descent to a variety of documents. Documents used to address my research question regarding the enabling conditions of the Common Core consisted, in part, of secondary ELA and standards-based reform histories as well as documents about social movements and ideological shifts. Choosing a current topic appealed to me in terms of relevancy and potential researcher and reader interest, but the newness of the topic also precipitated a plethora of fresh commentary on the new standards. For example, on any given day after the Common Core State Standards were introduced in the summer of 2010, I found in my email inbox articles and commentary from *Education Week* and a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) discussion forum. Common Core headlines jumped from the pages of the *New York Times*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and the *Athens Banner-Herald*. Tweets from famous education historians such as Diane Ravitch and classroom teachers alike critiquing the Common Core appeared on my Twitter feed under the hashtag #commoncore. Professional education organizations including

NCTE released Common Core-related statements on their websites. State departments of education, think tanks, and education foundations published commentaries of condemnation and support. Every few days during this project I checked blogs, newspapers, discussion boards, and Twitter for leads to new documents.

Ultimately, I chose to use only documents that helped me understand my study's focal questions: (a) the Common Core ELA Standards' discourse, (b) the Common Core ELA Standards' description of ELA and the ELA student, and (c) the factors that made the Common Core ELA Standards' description of ELA and the ELA student possible. The Common Core ELA Standards and supplementary documents met the first two of the three criteria I listed above. A range of other documents helped me address the third criterion. Policy-related historical policy texts (e.g., Cross, 2004; DeBray, 2006; Spring, 2005) and reform-related texts (e.g., Sarason, 1990; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Tye, 2000) provided details about the broader contexts of ELA standards that supplemented what I found in works that are more ELA subject-specific (e.g., Applebee, 1974; Myers, 1996). Tracing lines of descent from the Common Core led me to many more subject-specific and standards-related documents published by or about the National Council of Teachers of English (e.g., Beers, 2009; Benjamin & Schwartz, 1994; Maloney, 1997; NCTE, 2008; NCTE, 2009; Suhor, 1994; Wixson, Dutro, & Athan, 2003).

Tracing lines of descent from the Common Core also led me to documents from organizations (e.g., Achieve, Inc.; Alliance for Excellent Education, Fordham) whose work directly influenced the Common Core's development. For example, I focused on transcripts and video from a 2010 Achieve's American Diploma Project Leadership Team Meeting because the ADP was a precursor to the Common Core. Also, the meeting included a panel discussion with

the Common Core ELA Standards' lead writers, and a keynote address by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

Disrupting Notions of Natural Linear Progressions

A tenet of Enlightenment humanism is that humanity and human projects are in a constant state of progress. The implication for education, then, is that the endeavor is ever-improving. The fact that the Georgia Department of Education (2011a), as I noted in Chapter 1, referred to the Common Core Standards as the “common sense next step from the Georgia Performance Standards” (para. 1) indicates Georgia’s acceptance of the Common Core as the next logical step in a linear, historical progression of standards-based reform. Foucault (1977) wrote, however, that genealogy “rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies” (p. 140). Although Secretary Duncan called the Common Core’s development and acceptance a “quiet revolution” (Duncan 2010a; 2010b), efforts to more specifically name what students should know and do are not revolutionary, new, commonsense steps in an ever-improving progression. In fact, when an education crisis is named, education reform efforts are often more of a return than a progression because reforms turn to a past that Apple (2004) referred to as “a romanticized pastoral past” (p. 17). In other words, efforts at reforms aimed at students’ future prosperity are often an appeal to foundationalism, a positivist return to the fundamentals, or, in the Common Core’s case, the core. To disrupt the perception of the Common Core Standards as the next step in a logical progression, I began with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* and disrupted its possibility as an origin by placing it in a pattern of repetition rather than progress and by showing its adjacency to other productive events within a network of power that enabled the emergence of the Common Core Standards.

Looking Ahead, Reaching Back

Sputnik.

To demonstrate the education reform pattern of declaration of crisis with a return to some form of positivism, I turn to the Soviet Union's 1957 launch of Sputnik, "the world's first earth-orbiting satellite" (Kliebard, 1986, p. 264), and its impact on American public education. In the early 1940s, a decade before Sputnik's launch, high school enrollment, which had risen dramatically in the first decades of the 20th century, decreased. Kliebard (1986) attributed this decline to three probable causes: (a) low birth rates, (b) the high rate of military enlistment, and (c) the lure of factory jobs that held more sway than a high school education. Because of this attrition, "the holding power of the high school arose as a significant issue" (Kliebard, p. 242). Life adjustment education was the response to this issue, aptly named because its focus was not the college bound student but the general education student, and the program was designed to be "attuned to the actual life functions of youth as preparation for adulthood" (Kliebard, p. 250). Although this program gained much initial support, it came under fire because critics believed relevancy had replaced basic knowledge and values: "The schools had failed miserably in teaching the most elementary skills, and education itself had been systematically divested of its moral and intellectual content" (Cremins, 1961, p. 340). Sounding an alarm that would ring again 26 years later with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act, the launch of Sputnik in 1957 was the final death knell for life adjustment education.

When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, education in the United States became a national security issue. Vice-Admiral Hyman Hickover blamed the education system for America's failure to be the first in space, claiming that it had "gone soft" and that "a misconceived notion of equality had led American schools to degenerate" (Kliebard, 1986, p.

265). Believing that the Soviet educational system had surpassed the American system, Congress passed the National Defense Act of 1958, and education was for the first time designated a national security issue (Kliebard, p. 266). At the subsequent Basic Issues Conferences in the late 1950s, the English curriculum became sequenced, complete with a new list of texts students should read in preparation for future college success (Applebee, 1974, pp. 193-195). A sequential, age-specific ELA curriculum has “hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history” (Foucault, 1977, p. 144) as is evidenced once again in the Common Core ELA Standards.

The crisis declared after the launch of Sputnik and the accompanying rejection of a life-adjustment approach to education enabled two lasting positivist developments in ELA: the sequenced curriculum discussed above and New Criticism, a critical literary theory originated by John Crowe Ransom of Vanderbilt University (Scholes, 1987, p. 153). Scholes noted that scholars, such as Robert Penn Warren, known more for their poetry than their criticism, promoted New Criticism’s early success in universities (p. 153). Regardless of what literature students studied, New Criticism’s task was “to explore the structure (and hence meaning) and the success (and hence worth) of a given piece of literature, with the success itself being judged on the basis of structural principles” (Applebee, 1974, p. 162). New Critical Theory, which made its way from the university to the high school classroom, is a positivist endeavor whose goal is to make the study of a text scientific, to find the text’s inherent and purposeful structure and meaning, regardless of who’s reading the text.

The Publication of *A Nation at Risk*.

In 1983, mirroring the Sputnik-inspired pattern of seeking progress by looking backward for fundamental basics, the U.S. Department of Education's National Commission on Excellence

in Education declared that “we have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge” (p. 9). The commission’s report, *A Nation at Risk*, arrived on the heels of a movement in the late 1970s that Smith (1978) described as a “legitimate, widespread back-to-basics movement...that is certainly not the first but it may well be the most significant in the three-hundred-plus-year history of [the United States]” (p. 195). *A Nation at Risk* made the hyperbolic exclamation that “if an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war” (*A Nation at Risk*, p. 9). The report went on to extol America’s educational past:

While we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur – others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments. (p. 9)

Expounding on the superiority of the past, *A Nation at Risk* went on to say.

For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents.

It is important, of course, to recognize that *the average citizen* today is better educated and more knowledgeable than the average citizen of a generation ago – more literate, and exposed to more mathematics, literature, and science. The positive impact of this fact on the well-being of our country and the lives of our people cannot be overstated.

Nevertheless, *the average graduate* of our schools and colleges today is not as well educated as the average graduate of 25 or 35 years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population completed high school. (pp. 11-12)

Reflecting the pattern following Sputnik's launch, the 1983 crisis report pointed to the state of education as one of crisis and then turned to the past in preparation for the future: "Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them" (p. 9). Ever since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, education reform has consisted of a renewed effort to (re)define the basics, to finally get it right by clearly defining a discipline's core practices and knowledge.

A Nation at Risk is most often pointed to as the primary catalyst for standards-based reform as a movement. Marshall (2008) asserted that this report "provided the rhetorical framework in which standards-based reform efforts would proceed over the next quarter century" (p. 114). In 1983, President Reagan built his education reform proposals within this framework when he identified raising state academic standards as one of his six education reforms (Cross, 2004, p. 79). Heeding the President's call for academic standards, states began to develop their own standards. For example, Georgia passed the Quality Basic Education Act (QBE) in 1985, one of whose mandates was the creation of a state curriculum, the QCC, which I referred to in Chapter 1. *A Nation at Risk*'s pattern of crisis and return to a romanticized superior past continued to guide education policy into 1990s as it had become "the framing assumption in policy debates about schooling, and the ground had been prepared for the development of national standards across school subjects that would address that decline" (Marshall, 2008, p. 116).

Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism

Because Foucaultian genealogy rejects a single historical event such as *A Nation at Risk* as an origin, I must contextualize the report's significance as an event within the network of power that made the Common Core possible. That is, I must present it in its "adjacency," its "simultaneity within ostensibly different fields" (Bové, 1990, p. 60). In particular, I must present it in its adjacency to events in the fields of economics and politics. Myers (1996) wrote that

our dominant form of literacy is always the product of an explicit public debate and contention, often an unacknowledged one. And the choices between one form of literacy and another are frequently implicit in other decisions, often located in obscure resolutions of technological, economic, and political differences. (p.102)

What counts as literacy in the Common Core is a product of the political and economic events of the early 1980s. *A Nation at Risk* was published in the early 1980s during the Reagan administration at the same time that neoliberalism became what Harvey (2005) referred to as a "conceptual apparatus" (p. 5) of economic philosophy. In fact, Reagan's election as President of the United States along with Margaret Thatcher's election as Prime Minister of Great Britain ushered in neoliberalism, which Harvey (2005) described as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). Within neoliberalism, the individual is more valuable than the collective, and the individual gains freedom from the market. Prime Minister Thatcher went so far as to assert that there was "no such thing as society, only individual men and women" (Harvey, p. 23).

Neoliberalism relies on “panic,” what educators Berliner and Biddle (1995) referred to as a “Manufactured Crisis” (p. 5), to serve as a catalyst for reforms. Reflecting neoliberalism’s influence in education reform and policy, standards became the de facto reform method. Spring (2005) asserted, however, that “the most important educational fact is that there are *no* longitudinal studies that describe the *type of educated person* that will result from a system of schooling governed by federal and state educational standards and tests” (p. 90). Despite a lack of evidence that they have a particular impact, standards have been the unquestioned centerpiece of all significant education reform efforts for the last thirty years despite evidence because of neoliberalism’s and neoconservatism’s hegemonic influences. Apple (2006) posited that neoliberalism has manifested its influence in the field of education through panic that has

led to attacks on teachers and teacher unions and to increasing support of marketisation and tighter control through centralized curricula and national testing. These fears are exacerbated and used by dominant groups in the politico-economic arena who have been able to shift the debate on education (and all things social) onto their own terrain – the terrain of traditionalism, standardization, productivity, marketisation, and economic needs. (p. 22)

Explaining how neoliberalism’s “corporate managerialism has had parallel impacts on public-sector bureaucracies and traditionally state-run and state-sponsored enterprises” (Luke, 2002, p. 199) such as education, Luke summarized its characteristics as the following:

- *cultures of performativity* that use the “multiple performance and feedback systems using simplified assessment data;”
- *steering from a distance* via “data-driven surveillance;”

- *output-based funding* where “increasingly scarce public funding is provided not on the basis of traditional input measures...but through quantifiable outcomes;” and
- *marketisation* with “the construction of educational systems of “choice” within differentiated institutional fields of traditional and alternative state-subsidised and corporate powers selling commodified knowledge and credentials” (p. 199).

Neoliberalism’s education discourse, then, is one that broadens the industrial model of schooling within a market-driven context so that the focus is on the student as output measured by assessment data aligned to standards of success. Harvey (2005) noted that “if successful, [a] conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken for granted and not open to question” (p. 5). According to Harvey, “neoliberalism has, in fact, become hegemonic as a mode of discourse” (p. 3).

Among what Apple (2006) named a “hegemonic alliance” (p. 22) in addition to the neoliberals, are “neo-conservative intellectuals who want a ‘return’ to higher standards and a ‘common culture’” (Apple, 2004, p. 15). Apple wrote that

all of them believe that only by tightening control over curriculum and teaching (and students, of course), restoring ‘our’ lost traditions, and making education more disciplined and competitive, as they are certain it was in the past, can we have effective schools. (p. 17)

Apple (2006) referred to these concepts as

a “new hegemonic alliance” that has a wide umbrella. It combines four major groups: dominant neoliberal economic and political elites intent on “modernizing” the economy and the institutions connected to it; economic and cultural neoconservatives who want a return to “high standards,” discipline and social Darwinist competition; some working

class and middle-class groups who mistrust the state and are concerned with security, the family, and traditional knowledge and values and who form an increasingly active segment of what might be called “authoritarian populists.” (p. 22)

These groups represent neoliberalism’s and neoconservatism’s pervasiveness that enabled the Common Core’s emergence as a market-based solution (i.e., college- and career-readiness standards) to a market-based problem (i.e., an ill-prepared work force).

Neoliberalism’s imprint on college and career readiness.

Throughout the United States’ education system’s history, standards development has primarily been the purview of content and pedagogy experts from universities and professional education organizations. Wixson, Dutro, and Athan (2003) noted that “over time, standard-setting efforts became more inclusive processes that involved not only education professionals but also parents, members of the business community, and other representatives of the public with a stake in the education system” (p. 77). The influence of the business community and corporate money has expanded under the hegemonic influence of neoliberalism.

The National Governors Association, one of the sponsors of the Common Core State Standards, has been involved in standards-based reform since 1989, when President Bush called on the association to convene an education summit that named the creation of national standards as one of the six national goals for education. In fact, one of the catalysts for the National Council of Teachers of English’s involvement in national standards in the early 1990s was the federal government’s consideration of using the National Governors Association or a public think-tank to write the ELA standards (Myers, 2011). Even though the National Governors Association’s members are state governors and not educators, they have significant support from the business community.

The National Governors Association is reliant on “corporate fellows” whose contributions support “the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and positions [the fellows] and [their] colleagues as intellectual resources for providing governors ideas that work” (NGA, n.d.). In the past the federal government funded educational standards efforts, but now foundations headed by business leaders contribute a tremendous amount of money to education reform efforts, including the development of standards. Among the National Governors Association’s fellows are corporations (e.g., ACT, Microsoft, The College Board, Educational Testing Service, Wal-Mart Stores) who fund or whose foundations fund, contribute to, and/or collaborate with many of the groups associated with the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

The association partnered with the business community in 1998 to form ACT Achieve, Inc. In 2001, Achieve created the American Diploma Project, which was a prominent precursor to the Common Core States Standards. Like the Common Core, the American Diploma Project’s focus is on college and career readiness: “Through the ADP Network governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders and business executives work together to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning high school standards, graduation requirements and assessment and accountability systems with the demands of college and careers” (Achieve, 2011, para. 2). Business partners include the Education Trust, the Fordham Foundation and the National Alliance of Business. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation⁵ is a contributor to almost every group involved in the American Diploma Project. Part of the work of American Diploma Project

⁵ The influence of corporations and foundations, particularly the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, have had on education reform and within the organizations involved with the work of the Common Core is well-documented (e.g., Ravitch, 2010; Saltman, 2009).

was to work with “K–12, postsecondary and business leaders” and their partner states “to identify the English and mathematics knowledge and skills needed for success in both college and work” (American Diploma Project, 2004, p. 4).

In its review of the ELA Common Core Standards’ first released draft, an NCTE review team (2009) critiqued the Common Core for its narrow focus on college and career readiness, stating that “there are important dimensions of education beyond these two domains” (p. 5). The NCTE review team contradicted the narrow focus of the Common Core by saying that

the most important [purpose] perhaps is education for social and civic participation. A central purpose of education—and certainly literacy education—has been to create citizens who understand and evaluate complex situations within societies and to influence the democratic process ethically, responsibly, and effectively. Much reading and writing in college centers on the public good, with students frequently asked to produce texts that address various publics, not only other academics. (p. 6)

Likewise, Wraga (2010) critiqued the standards for having a “blindspot” that could “undermine not only the quality of public education, but also the strength of our democracy” because they “represent a contracted view of the ‘common core’ that disregards the role of schools in preparing students for citizenship” (para. 1). Neither of these critiques dismissed the importance of college and career readiness but stressed broader purposes beyond the neoliberal focus on individual productivity and future success as a worker.

The discourses of positivism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism frame the network of power in which the Common Core’s description of ELA defined narrowly as literacy and the ELA student described as a docile body seem natural. Apple (2004) asserted that “critical educational research, policy, and practice require the fundamental interruption of common

sense” (p. 14). The hegemony of neoliberalism, neopositivism, and neoconservatism make certain questions possible and their answers appear obvious. For example, who would question that schools should have high expectations of all students? Who would question that all students should have options available to them upon completion of high school? Who would question that students should know how to read complex texts and write an argument supported with evidence? Who would argue that students need to understand grammar and the conventions of writing? Who would question that students need to know the essentials (whatever that means) of any field? These questions are almost beyond asking because their answers seem natural and matters of common sense. According to Apple (2004), however, “common sense is already being radically altered, but not in directions that many critical educators would find comforting” (p. 14). Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, standards have become the commonsense response to academic crises in public education despite the dearth of evidence of their efficacy. Ironically, though, thirty years of standards-based reform has not ended the need for reform, as is evidenced by the perceived need for the Common Core.

A False Appraisal

Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of the Common Core ELA Standards is not their promotion as assurance for college- and career-readiness or their description of ELA and the ELA student but that their widespread and quick adoption across the United States by states with acclaimed and critiqued standards alike. Even though there have been federal efforts to establish national standards in the past, the idea of national standards in the United States or any widely agreed upon standards has always seemed unattainable. Wixson et al. (2003) asserted that consensus has been difficult to achieve even about the “fundamental nature, purposes, and processes associated with standards and standard setting” (p. 72). Haycock (2010) acknowledged

that “even in a single grade and subject” common national standards were once “politically unthinkable” (p. 17). Historically, then, naming and agreeing on what counts as the core of any subject has not been easy and, for many, desirable.

According to Duncan (2010b), in the most recent reforms, including the Common Core, “there is far more consensus than people think” (para. 63). The Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s Finn and Petrilli (2010) remarked that “the nation’s governors and state school chiefs have achieved laudable consensus around a set of math and English standards, developed voluntarily and without federal involvement through the Common Core State Standards Initiative” (p. 1). A set of standards presented by any one entity from this group would probably not be accepted nationally. For example, Wixson et al. (2003), acknowledging the “range of views within and outside” even one content area such as ELA, posited that “the national organizations would be hard-pressed to achieve consensus on more specific national standards” (p. 88). The Common Core Standards, however, claim input and consensus from groups including democrats and republicans, educators and business leaders, politicians and parents. According the Common Core Standards’ Introduction (2010e), the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association worked with representatives

from participating states, a wide range of educators, content experts, researchers, national organizations, and community groups. These final standards reflect the invaluable feedback from the general public, teachers, parents, business leaders, states, and content area experts and are informed by the standards of other high performing nations. (para. 2)

Wixson et al. (2003) noted that “the perceived success of the consensus process is also related to the time allotted for the completion of a standard-setting effort” (p. 78). They pointed to the National Council of Mathematics’ decade-long successful effort at standards development as an

example. Similarly, although with different results, five years elapsed before NCTE published its 12 standards and supplementary material. The Common Core State Standards Initiative that involved so many contributors completed its work within a year. The initiative resulted in national standards not because the Common Core are the culmination of a lengthy, reflective chronological process but because a national consensus – or at least a convincing appearance of one – was quickly reached.

Despite approval of the groups listed in the Common Core’s introduction, the claims of consensus around the Common Core are what Foucault (1977) would refer to as a “false appraisal” (p. 146). The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2011) defines *consensus* as “agreement in opinions; the collective unanimous opinion of a number of persons.” Although a “number of persons” may have agreed to the adoption of the standards, significant voices were not among them. Before I discuss the Common Core’s claims of consensus, I must first explain the “network of power” that has traditionally produced ELA standards. I begin by contextualizing federal efforts to promote national standards. I then describe the role the university and professional education organizations have historically played and then explain how any claim of consensus within this network of power is a “false appraisal” (Foucault, 1977, p. 146) whose perpetuation enabled the Common Core’s widespread acceptance.

Federal Buy-in(g)

Even though the notion of national standards was unthinkable, standards-based reform has always had bipartisan support. At the state and federal levels of government, the advancement of standards-based reform has been a surprisingly bipartisan one (Cross, 2004; DeBray, 2006). For example, in 1989, President George H.W. Bush called on the National Governors Association to hold a summit on education, which included then-governor Bill

Clinton of Arkansas. Two outcomes of this summit, to which no educators were invited, were (1) six National Education Goals, one of which was a shared vision of national standards, and (2) the National Education Goals Panel (DeBray, 2006). This Republican-initiated summit laid the groundwork for Democratic President Clinton's education policy centerpiece, Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which built on the National Education Goals (Spring, 2005, p. 69). Title I funding served as the leverage for Clinton's goal of "setting a time frame for states' adoption of content and performance standards as well as assessments" (DeBray, 2006, p. 30). In Goals 2000, Clinton espoused standards as Bush had but lacked full support from Congress because he did not include support for vouchers, one of the main Republican agenda items (Spring, 2005, p. 104). In 1997, Republicans, fearing too much federal interference, rejected Clinton's proposal because of its inclusion of national tests (DeBray, 2006, p. 34).

National discipline-specific education organizations took leadership roles to develop standards for widespread adoption, beginning with the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), which voluntarily developed its own standards in 1989. In 1993, the Office of Educational Research and Improvement gave grants to several national professional subject-specific groups, including NCTE, to develop standards for their disciplines (DeBray, 2006, p. 27). From the government's perspective, NCTE's efforts proved less successful than NCTM's. Once NCTE began drafting the ELA standards, their grant was canceled because "it became clear that the council would not produce what the administration sought in specificity and rigor" (Cross, 2004, p. 103). NCTE stood behind its completed work, although its standards still had no bearing on how states, at least Georgia, defined ELA.

Despite the differences between the political parties' perspectives about education policy in terms of federal involvement, testing, and school choice, what they each agreed on was that

higher standards would increase achievement (DeBray, 2006; Spring, 2004). In 1996, the governors at the National Education Summit, recognizing the difficulty of consensus around national standards and the political obstacles to such a federally funded project, decided that “the pursuit of national standards had failed and that the states would be the primary vehicle for future standards development” (Wixson et al., 2003, p. 78). Nonetheless, the continued shared belief in standards-based reform led to bipartisan support for President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act, which tied education funding to states’ having standards. NCLB’s notion of national standards shifted the designation of *national* from federal to nation-wide.

To successfully mandate standards, NCLB, “the federal embodiment of [standards-based reform],” (Kaestle, 2006, p. xi) exemplified a neoliberal business model using standards and standards-based assessments to address the nation’s perceived risk of loss of power and stature in the world via an inadequate education system. NCLB explicitly described the federal government’s expectations for schools and was intended to erase the achievement gap among various racial, ability, and socioeconomic groups through four goals: (1) accountability, (2) greater choice for parents, (3) more flexibility for states’ use of federal money, and (4) a stronger emphasis on “proven methods” (United States Department of Education, n.d.). Ravitch (2010) noted the irony of the bipartisan contributions to NCLB where “a conservative Republican president was responsible for the largest expansion of federal control in the history of American education,” and “Democrats embraced market reforms and other initiatives that traditionally had been favored by Republicans” (p. 21). As required by NCLB, states developed new curricula based on minimum standards and created (or paid testing companies to develop) assessments to determine whether students met the standards. Ravitch claimed, however, that “most states settled for ‘standards’ that were bland and soporific to avoid battles over what students should

learn” (p. 30). Ultimately, the differing quality of states’ standards was a catalyst for renewed calls for common national standards.

Embracing neoliberal market reforms, the Obama administration developed the Race to the Top Fund as part of the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that pushed standards but described them as common rather than national. Haycock (2010) noted that “one of [Secretary Duncan’s] first big moves was to tie stimulus dollars, especially those in the coveted ‘Race to the Top’ competition, to participation in the common-standards effort” (p. 17). States must compete for the education funds by demonstrating innovation and progress in four areas, the first being standards: “Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 2). Race to the Top, then, ties funding to common standards for college and career readiness without mandating or sponsoring them.

The Common Core’s passage reflected the political climate in which they emerged. With an economic recession and pervasive anti-federal government sentiment, as was evident with the Tea Party’s emergence and disdain with what it saw as the federal government’s expanding role and the party’s desire to make it smaller, federal education standards would be seen as an expensive over step of the federal government’s role in what many see is a states issue.

Throughout the Common Core website, as well as the Georgia Department of Education’s announcement of the June 2, 2010 introduction of the Common Core Standards, the Common Core is often alluded to as “state-led education standards” (Georgia Department of Education, 2010, para. 1). These documents emphasize that even though the standards are national, they are not federally mandated. Referring to the Common Core as voluntary national state standards is not semantic trickery but a smart move to eliminate an automatic connection to the federal

government. Haycock (2010) even noted that the Council of Chief State School Officers' "unifying theme" was "better us than the federal government" (p. 17). The fact that both the National Governors Association and Georgia included in the "Frequently Asked Questions" sections of their Common Core websites a question asking if the Common Core was created by the Federal government with the answer "no," demonstrates their assumption that readers would prefer that the standards not be created by the federal government. Naming the standards as voluntary and states-driven delicately and successfully sidestepped any opposition to federal involvement in national education standards.

The University: Content-area and Education Professors

Universities have historically been within secondary ELA's network of power. College English requirements have always played a role in determining what secondary schools require of ELA students. For example, in 1896, when the various disciplines of grammar, literature study, and composition and rhetoric were brought together under the title *English* at the Conference on English, what counted as English depended on whose interpretation of *English* dominated. What emerged was English as preparation for college. Not only have colleges always played a role in naming the knowledge and skills that count as ELA, but they have also been involved in naming specific secondary ELA curriculum. Their influence became prominent most notably in 1894, when the National Association of Educators convened the Committee of Ten. Prompted by competing entrance requirements among Ivy League schools such as Harvard and Yale, the committee's subject-area conferences met "to consider the whole problem of secondary school studies" (Applebee, 1974, p. 32). Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard, served as the chair of the all-male committee, while prominent philosopher Herbert Spencer, an opponent of public education who touted science as the most valuable knowledge, was, according to Cremin

(1961), a catalyst for the work of the committee. As a result of the Conference on English, “a subject called ‘English’ was now a required experience for all secondary students” (Myers, 1996, p. 83). The driving force behind what “English” would consist of via the recommendation of the committee was what colleges required students to know for admittance. What emerged as the focus of high school English was the college-bound student.

At the turn of the 20th century, just as at the beginning of the 21st century, college readiness was a driving concern because colleges considered students unprepared for college entrance exams, so the question became what texts should high school English courses require students to read. The answer was a result of the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English that issued the Uniform Book List. According to Myers (1996), the list “put control of the high school curriculum in the hands of colleges and universities, named the required canonical works of English literature, and named English a national subject” (p. 83). The representatives at the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English were secondary school teachers and college representatives (Leonard, 1912). Two other conferences, the Basic Issues Conference of 1958 and The Dartmouth Seminar of 1966, aimed at (re)defining what English were also comprised primarily of college English educators along with secondary English teachers. University faculty participating in the Basic Issues Conferences represented groups such as the Modern Language Association. Situated in the wake of Sputnik’s launch, this conference addressed issues such as required curriculum and curriculum sequencing. University faculty attending the Dartmouth Seminar were members of the College English Association and American Studies Association. Also strongly represented at each conference was the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

Professional Education Organizations

National professional education organizations have been integrally involved in the development of national standards for various content areas. Throughout its history NCTE, which is comprised of K-12 ELA educators as well as university ELA educators and teacher educators, has contributed significantly to the conversation around what the purpose of ELA is and what counts as ELA. The organization was, in fact, founded in an effort to combat narrow descriptions of curriculum (Applebee, 1974; Hook, 1979). Dismayed by the influence of college entrance requirements and exams on the high school English curriculum, teachers in New York and Chicago met several times in the latter part of the 20th century's first decade to protest the college entrance examinations. In 1911, at a National Education Association meeting, a resolution was passed to establish a "national council of teachers of English" (Applebee, p. 52). NCTE advocated the necessity of addressing the needs of all students rather than just the college-bound student (Myers, 1996, p. 84). Ultimately, NCTE influenced college boards not to rely and test on lists of specific literature (Applebee, 1974, p. 54). As I mentioned earlier, NCTE participated in other early efforts to define what counts as English at the Basic Issues Conference of 1958, and the Dartmouth Seminar in 1966. NCTE along with the International Reading Association (IRA) also spearheaded the effort to develop national ELA standards in the mid-1990s, although their federal funding was halted, which I discuss in great detail later in this chapter.

Who is included in claims of consensus reflects whose opinions are considered significant. NCTE values its memberships' content-specific and pedagogical knowledge: "We advocate for policies that draw on the collective knowledge and wisdom of accomplished educators in English language arts and English studies" (NCTE, n.d., para. 1). Despite its

historical involvement in conversations about what counts as ELA, NCTE was not invited to participate in the writing of the ELA Common Core Standards. Kylene Beers (2009), then President of NCTE, expressed that “[she] was disappointed that the [CCSSO] did not consult NCTE when they began their work on the standards document” (para. 9). According to Beers, one NCTE member was a part of the feedback group but did not officially represent NCTE. In June 2009, the Council of Chief State School Officers invited NCTE to “offer a response to the draft of the standards” (Beers, para. 4). NCTE agreed to provide feedback because, if the Common Core ELA Standards were inevitable, NCTE at least wanted to take advantage of any opportunity to provide input that they could. A committee convened by NCTE provided feedback on Common Core ELA Standards drafts – both complete and partial – in July 2009, January 2010, and February 2010. (See reports at <http://www.ncte.org/search?q=NCTE+Report+Common+Core>) Participation by NCTE in the feedback process, however, did not lead to the organization’s endorsement of the Common Core ELA Standards. Although NCTE provided feedback on the Common Core drafts, NCTE did not provide a statement of support of the final draft. NCTM provided two. (See http://www.corestandards.org/assets/k12_statements/National-Council-of-Teachers-of-Mathematics-Statement-of-Support.pdf)

Summary

Sikka (2008) noted Foucault’s argument that “claims of truth or commonsense (which may be presented as having been arrived at through consensus, i.e. democracy) mask a strategy of oppression and normalization” (p. 232, Footnote). Foucault even made claims that consensus

does violence⁶. Claims of consensus can shut down the inclusion of discourses as who gets to speak what is true has been established and competing discourses are silenced. In the next section I explore the shift that took place where those who once were charged with naming ELA were usurped based on the perception of what students need for college and career. For a standards project such as the Common Core, this shift resulted in a narrow definition of ELA that enables the ELA student the Common Core produces.

Sifting Standards through Domination, Submission, and Resistance

Neoliberalism's emergence and hegemonic influence made possible college and career readiness as the goal for secondary ELA, and the goal of college and career readiness made possible certain kinds of standards. What standards fit into the discourse of neoliberalism and neoconservativism has been demonstrated more in terms of what standards do not fit. To demonstrate this point, I discuss in this section the critiques of standards-writing efforts by content- and pedagogy-experts as well as states during the last twenty years. Not only do these failed attempts show what standards within the discourse of neoliberalism and neoconservativism cannot look like, but they also exemplify who within this discourse is allowed to say what ELA is and why content experts from groups such as NCTE and IRA were not among the confederation of consensus.

NCTE and IRA

In the wake of *A Nation at Risk*, national discipline-specific education organizations took leadership roles to develop standards with varying degrees of success. When NCTM developed

⁶ I understand Foucault to have used *violence* to mean “undue constraint applied to some natural process, habit, etc., so as to prevent its free development or exercise” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

its own standards in 1989, then Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander was so pleased with the standards that he took them wherever he spoke “to illustrate that it was possible to create good standards” (Cross, 2004, p. 103). Ravitch (1992) named the NCTM standards as one impetus for national standards. In 1991, NCTE and IRA applied for a federal grant to fund the development of ELA standards. According to IRA and NCTE (1996), “if the federal government were to fund a voluntary standards project in English, then IRA and NCTE wanted to be involved” (p. vii). After funding approval in the fall of 1992, NCTE and IRA worked on the Standards Project for English Language Arts (SPELA) with the University of Illinois, “a public agency [that] could administer a large grant of federal funds” (Myers, 2011, p. 34). Being generative rather than prescriptive, the SPELA standards would more likely, according to Suhor (1994) “guide classroom instruction in both general and specific ways” (p. 25). In other words, the curriculum and instruction resulting from the SPELA standards would be student-centered because “the perspective informing the English language arts standards places the learner at the center” (IRA & NCTE, 1996, p. 23). This student-centered approach to standards development mirrored the “growth model” from which ELA educators worked at both the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar and the 1987 English Coalition Conference, which included more K-12 teachers than Dartmouth did. Moffett (as cited in Myers, 2011) wrote that “the primary dimension of growth seems to be the movement from the center of the self outward” (p. 35). Chester Finn, assistant secretary of education, and E.D. Hirsch, author of *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know* (1988), spoke at the conference and said that

the emphasis on cultural diversity in English classes, implicit in the growth model, was often an ‘attack’ on the common core values of the US democracy; and second, the ‘natural growth’ model did not automatically lead to the interventions and cognitive tools

that all students would need to enter work and civic life in the 21st century. (Myers, 2011, p. 35)

From the government's perspective as well as many journalists' and commentators', NCTE's efforts proved far less successful than the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics'. NCTE and IRA began drafting the ELA standards, which consisted of only twelve academic standards that were not divided into separate content strands or sequenced by grade level. The NCTE and IRA standards stand in stark contrast to the Common Core ELA Standards in their purpose, content, and even their small number, which Wixson et al. (2003) called "arguably, the most consequential of SPELA's actions... a highly unusual move in standard-setting efforts and one that garnered much criticism" (p. 88). Wixson et al. noted that the ELA standards were radically different from other content areas, "the majority of which had been organized into grade-level clusters, if not by individual levels; as a result the ELA standards were found lacking in both content and specificity" (p. 88).

The DOE canceled SPELA's grant because "it became clear that the council would not produce what the administration sought in specificity and rigor" (Cross, 2004, p. 103). Myers (2011) contended, however, that

the DOE did not establish a set of federal guidelines telling NCTE and IRA how and what to write about English standards, and at no time did DOE open the writing of English standards to competitive bidding. There were no pre-conditions, no prior agreements about what NCTE and IRA should do. NCTE and IRA had an independent agreement to collaborate on a set of standards, and the federal government was offering to fund the effort. (p. 34)

Nevertheless, the SPELA standards' criticism was pointed and widespread. A particularly scathing critique came from a March 1996 *New York Times* opinion piece, "How not to write English," in which the standards' writers' expertise was called into question:

Given their professional credentials, these two groups could have produced a clear, candid case for greater competence in standard English, with its ample vocabulary and its simple yet supple grammar. Instead, the guideline writers quickly vanished into a fog of euphemism and evasion. (para. 3)

Much of the criticism echoed what Maloney (1997) critiqued about the Standards' language, lack of a mandate, and emphasis on process rather than content. Ravitch (2000) said bluntly that the standards were "lacking in content and actual standards" (p. 437). Ravitch's as well as others' critique pointed to the inclusion of input as well as output standards. Unlike the math standards, the NCTE and IRA ELA standards contained opportunity-to-learn (OTL) standards that addressed IRA and NCTE's (1996) belief that "standards, by themselves, cannot erase the impact of poverty, ethnic and cultural discrimination, family illiteracy, and social and political disenfranchisement" (p. 9). In other words, IRA and NCTE valued input standards as much as output in the name of democracy and social justice. The OTL standards included "(a) learning how to learn, (b) equal access to school resources, (c) an adequate number of knowledgeable teachers, and (d) safe, well-equipped schools" (IRA & NCTE, 1996, p. 9). Myers (2011) noted that the U.S. Department of Education's critique of the standards was partly based on the OTL standards because the DOE did not authorize them.

Consensus did not exist even within the ranks of NCTE membership. For example, Benjamin and Schwartz (1994) responded in NCTE's *The English Journal* to the Standards' expanded definition of text and inclusion of OTL standards by saying that "the Standards, as they

exist, go well beyond the typical purview of teaching and learning how to write effectively” (p. 28). Suhor (1994), however, called the criticisms “Kafkaesque” because they named what he saw as the project’s strengths as its weaknesses (p. 26). Likewise, Burke (1996) praised the vagueness of the standards and asserted that the vagueness made the standards more locally focused because they would generate local discussions about “what seem vague suggestions, clear mandates for their particular community, their school, or their classroom telling them what good English-language-arts education looks like” (para. 9).

Despite the onslaught of criticism and the loss of federal funding, NCTE and IRA stood behind their completed work and self-published *The Standards* in 1996, although the standards still had no bearing on how states, including Georgia, defined ELA. According to Wixson et al. (2003) one effect of *The Standards* was that its publication “all but seal[ed] the fate of efforts to develop national standards” (p. 77).

States’ Efforts

Before NCTE and IRA became involved in writing national standards, states had already begun to act in response to *A Nation at Risk* to create their own standards. In this section I focus on the work of two states, Texas and Georgia, as their early attempts at standards were critiqued for different reasons.

At the same time that NCTE and IRA were working on their Standards’ project and weathering intense criticism, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) began revision of their state’s reading standards. Within the context of then-Governor George W. Bush’s focus on reading and accountability, “various stakeholders and educators” began the “standard-setting process” (Wixson et al., 2003, p. 92). Upon receiving a draft of the standards, Governor Bush, echoing the critique of the IRA and NCTE *Standards*, is reported to have said, “No touchy-feely essays or

learning by osmosis, no holding hands until the karma is right, just straightforward lists of state expectations is what I expect from this study” (Associated Press, 1996). Almost 20 years later, Common Core ELA Standards’ writer David Coleman would echo Bush’s dismissal of narrative and “hand-holding” pre-reading strategies. Wixson et al. (2003) noted that some corporations evaluating state standards also critiqued standards that involved students relating personally to texts: “Fordham penalized states for including standards that encouraged students to relate ideas in literature to their own lives” (p. 98).

Conversely, some states’ standards projects were critiqued for being too specific. For example, Georgia passed the Quality Basic Education Act in 1985, one of whose mandates was the creation of a state curriculum, the Quality Core Curriculum (QCC), which I referred to in Chapter 1. Although this curriculum was supposed to be revised every four years, no significant revision was accomplished until almost twenty years later in 2002 (Georgia Department of Education, 2005, para. 11). The QCC served as Georgia’s curriculum until 2002, when a Phi Delta Kappa audit found that the QCC “lacked depth and could not be covered in a reasonable amount of time” (Georgia Department of Education, para. 3). This finding reflected Scholes’ (1998) assertion that a curriculum “is always a trade-off between knowledge and time” (p. 158). In the case of the QCC, the trade-off was not balanced. Not only was the QCC deemed unreasonable in its expectations, but teachers also largely ignored it. The QCC did not guide teaching by setting expectations. The only accountability that was connected to the QCC was each teacher’s notations of which QCC numbered objectives associated were written in lesson plan books. Some goals were never covered, and others were covered every day. In essence, the QCC’s plethora of objectives served no real function except possibly to justify teaching a topic, text, or process. The state conceded the inefficacy of the QCC, saying, “Inevitably, teachers used

the curriculum not as a guide for quality instruction, but as a reference to mention in lesson plans and then place back on the shelf” (Georgia Department of Education, 2005, para. 3).

Responding to the Phi Delta Kappan report and NCLB’s mandate that states must develop standards and matching assessments, Georgia developed and adopted the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). The GPS, defined as “the minimum of what teachers should teach and what students should know” (Georgia Department of Education, 2005, para. 10), differed from the Quality Core Curriculum in several ways. In addition to having a more narrow focus, the GPS was used by teachers to guide instruction. The state mandated that teachers use the GPS as a guide, and state assessments (e.g., End of Course tests, Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests, and, formerly, the Georgia High School Graduation Test) to test to what extent students learned the GPS. Another difference between the GPS and QCC and other states’ states’ standards was the way in which the standards were written. Unlike the QCC, which was composed of objectives, the GPS was made up of performance standards, which the Georgia Department of Education (2005) explained as follows:

Performance standards provide clear expectations for assessment, instruction, and student work. They define the level of work that demonstrates achievement of the standards, enabling a teacher to know “how good is good enough.” The performance standards isolate and identify the skills needed to use the knowledge and skills to problem-solve, reason, communicate, and make connections with other information. Performance standards also tell the teacher how to assess the extent to which the student knows the material or can manipulate and apply the information.

(para. 8)

Performance standards have been critiqued for a lack of content. For example, Ericsson (2005) posited that “although performance standards are important for the movement, they are inappropriate without carefully developed content standards” (p. 224). Ericsson also blamed performance standards for an “ ‘assessment-driven’ movement that focuses obsessively on testing (often standardized testing) as the only way to improve education” (p. 224). Responses to both the QCC’s learning objectives and the GPS’s performance standards demonstrate that no standards will be without their critics or be a panacea for all real or perceived shortcomings of public education.

The fate of NCTE and IRA’s standards efforts may also have influenced decisions regarding who would count as experts to write the Common Core Standards. According to Wixson et al. (2003), NCTE and IRA’s standards project and the response to it “crystallized many of the tensions inherent in standards development, including beliefs about standards and the roles they should serve, what content is most important for students to learn, and the nature of knowledge and teaching” (p. 85). Truly revolutionary standards, then, would be generative, divorced from age-specificity, and presented in no contrived sequence.

Expert Discourse: Saying What Is True

One component of the Common Core’s régime of truth is its mechanism of power (e.g., the standards themselves), “which enable[s] one to distinguish true and false statements” (Foucault, p. 131). The Common Core Standards’ discursive production of ELA and the ELA student reflects what claims regarding ELA and the ELA student are widely taken as true. The second component of the ELA Common Core’s régime of truth is the truth statements that Foucault (1977/1980a) described as “the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (p. 131). The Common Core’s truth régime makes the claim about what the purpose of

secondary ELA is for ELA students and what counts as the core – the basics – of ELA. As is evident by over 40 states’ adoption of the Common Core, almost without question, the Common Core has largely been accepted and functions as the truth about what counts as ELA and what counts as the “literate individual” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7) the ELA student should be upon mastery of the standards. In the last section I talked about the roles that the federal government, states, and professional organizations have played in the anything but revolutionary movement toward national ELA standards. An appropriate question to consider, then, is, who now has the power to name what is true about and what counts as ELA?

Although power does not come from a particular individual or people, power does move through individuals or groups of individuals. In the case of the Common Core, individuals were “charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault, 1977/1980a, p. 131). In others words, someone determined and wrote what counts as ELA and the ELA student. Mahon (1992) asked, “Who has the qualifications, the prestige, the status to speak a certain type of discourse, and from what institutional site does he or she speak” (p. 117)? I address Mahon’s question in this section as I discuss the third component of the Common Core’s régime of truth, the experts.

Content and Pedagogical Experts

To explore who counted as experts in the development of the Common Core, I return to Secretary Duncan’s (2010a) speech to Achieve, Inc’s American Diploma Project’s Leadership Team. Duncan himself hinted at who counts as a credible expert in standards development for the content of a given discipline and who does not. Most importantly, though, Duncan’s speech and the representatives to whom he spoke represent the present moment of standards-based reform in terms of who does and who has counted as an expert, as who has been invited to say what is true about ELA and math, the two disciplines for which the Common Core has standards.

As I noted earlier, Duncan first used the phrase “quiet revolution” in a speech to the National Press Club, where he asserted that “there is a growing sense that a quiet revolution is underway in our homes and schools, classrooms and communities” that is being “motivated by parents” and “driven” by educators, administrators, elected officials, stakeholders, foundations, and entrepreneurs (Duncan, 2010b, paras. 4-8). The tone Secretary Duncan (2010a) struck at the American Diploma Project Leadership team meeting was quite different as he drew a contrast between those represented at the conference and experts:

When the president issued that challenge in March of 2009, many so-called experts questioned whether states could work together to set rigorous, globally competitive standards or collaborate to develop assessments of 21st century skills. But resolute governors, state education chiefs, and committed stakeholders across the country have proved the skeptics dead-wrong. (para. 22)

Duncan continued to refer to experts by saying that

one would be hard-pressed to find a single pundit or education expert who foresaw this transformation. I've called it "the quiet revolution" – and it is a revolution being driven by leaders in statehouses, state superintendents, local lawmakers, district leaders, union heads, school boards, parents, principals, and teachers. (para. 24)

Undoubtedly, Duncan assumed that education experts and pundits were surprised by the collaborative, states-led effort to create and successfully promote national standards for ELA and mathematics.

Within the one short section of his speech that I shared earlier in this chapter, Duncan referred to experts twice, first as the skeptical “so-called experts” and then as the blindsided “education expert.” By contrasting others with the experts, one can infer that the experts of

which he speaks are not legislators, classroom teachers, superintendents and principals, foundations, or entrepreneurs. After all, those driving the revolution would not be surprised by it. Haycock (2010) also noted that “many people in higher education were caught by surprise when the nation's governors and chief state school officers announced their intention to adopt common standards for American high schools that aim at college readiness” (p. 14). Haycock’s implication, however, was that higher education faculty were surprised because they perceive those who developed the Common Core to be the same people who “have insisted for years that it is not their job to prepare all of their students for college—that if we didn't like the skill levels of some of our entering students, we shouldn't admit them” (Haycock, p. 14).

Standard Experts: The Entry of the Masked Other

Speaking to the American Diploma Project Network Leadership Team, the categories of people Duncan enumerated were present at the meeting. According to the agenda for the meeting, the presenters included mostly Achieve staff, university administrators, representatives from state departments of education, and business and foundation representatives. Other presenters included a few K-12 principals and leaders, some government representatives, and two university faculty members, both of whom were mathematics professors (Achieve, 2010b). On the morning of Secretary Duncan’s keynote address, Laura Slover, Vice President of Content and Policy Research for Achieve, moderated a breakfast session called “A breakfast discussion with the Common Core Standards writers.” Slover began by acknowledging participants in the Common Core’s development and noted that “Achieve, ACT, and the College Board staffed early writing teams” (Achieve, 2010a). Leading up to the introduction of the panel, Slover said, “In the end, as we all know, standards writing is not something that can be fully achieved by a committee. Someone must have the pen” (Achieve, 2010a). Slover then turned to the panel for

introductions of those who held the pen to write the Common Core standards. The two lead writers of the math standards were math professors. In a sharp distinction, the ELA writers, neither of whom is an ELA educator, work in the corporate sector of education. Only two of what Slover referred to as lead writers attended. The first ELA writer was David Coleman, the founder and CEO of Student Achievement Partners. Coleman, who holds a master's degree in English literature from Oxford University, had a brief stint as a lecturer at the University of London. Although the Student Achievement Partners' website notes that Coleman "taught reading to secondary students in the Ulysses S. Grant program for low income New Haven students" (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.) while he was a student at Yale, it makes no mention of his having any K-12 in-service teaching experience. Coleman has traveled around the country to speak to various groups about the Common Core and to demonstrate to educators how to teach a text using the Common Core ELA Standards. (See <http://neric.welearntube.org/?q=node/147>) The other lead writer, Susan Pimentel, works for StandardsWork, which she co-founded. She majored in elementary education, graduated from law school, and has had extensive experience in standards development in several states (StandardsWork, n.d.). In short, then, the lead writers for math were experts in math, and the lead writers for ELA were experts in standards. The Georgia Department of Education (2011a) may have most accurately distinguished the Common Core experts by saying that the Common Core Standards were "developed by standards experts and educators" (para. 5). The emphasis on standards experts is ironic given the Common Core's emphasis on content knowledge.

Those responsible for developing the Common Core were organized into three groups - the writing team, the feedback committee, and the validation committee. Within the Common Core Standards documents themselves, no author is named (Common Core, 2010a). Coleman,

Pimentel, and Jim Patterson, the other lead writer, were not the only writers of the ELA Common Core, although they were, as Slover (Achieve, 2010a) said, the ones holding the pen. Haycock (2010) asserted, however, that

content-area experts from Achieve, the College Board, and ACT—with assistance from a less well-known organization, Student Achievement Partners—drafted the standards. Once that draft was done, this group was disbanded and replaced by a group of lead writers and a much broader one of national experts, including key math and English/language arts people from about a dozen states. (p. 17)

The National Governors Association provided a list of what they refer to as a work team, but there is no clear indication of the level of involvement of each participant. According to the National Governors Association (2010), “six governors and chief state school officers from states involved in the CCSSI selected the individual VC members based on nominations from national organizations and states” (p. 2). In other words, the validation committee, the group most represented by content and pedagogical experts rather than testing company representatives, did not write drafts of the standards but provided feedback. Their mission was to “review the process used to develop the Common Core State Standards and provide input and feedback” and “validate the sufficiency of the evidence supporting the Common Core State Standards” (p. 2). The committee met to discuss the standards in April 2010 during the time that public feedback was also solicited. According to the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010), “the day-long conversation resulted in rich, substantive feedback that informed the final content of the Common Core State Standards” (p. 2). The group reviewed the standards again in May 2010, and the NGA formally introduced the

standards on June 2, 2010. In short, the group met twice to provide feedback within three months of the introduction of the final draft to the nation.

The Repetitive Subject

Bové (1990) wrote that

indeed, from Foucault's point of view, all intellectuals, all teachers and students within the disciplines, are to some extent incorporated within these systems of control based upon the mode of knowledge and truth production that defines much of our social world.

There is, in other words, no place for any of us to stand outside of it. (p. 54)

Regardless of new and persistent corporate influence and the shift from content and pedagogical knowledge to standards knowledge as a measure of expertise, the Common Core ELA Standards' description of ELA and itself is a repetition of the identity *ELA student*. According to Foucault (1977/1908b), "the individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle" (p. 98). As former ELA students, then, we are all reproducers of the ELA subject. Butler (1992) wrote "for if the subject is constituted by power, that power does not cease at the moment the subject is constituted, for that subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and again" (p. 13). Those who develop standards such as the Common Core are themselves subjects once constituted as ELA student subjects by the discourse of ELA. As Tye (2000) summarized from his reading of Larabee (1999), "Inevitably, everybody in the society 'knows' what schools are for and how they are supposed to be, because everyone was a student and experienced it firsthand" (p. 12). As former ELA students we know the conventional discourse of ELA. Having completed what Lortie (2002) referred to as an apprenticeship of observation via years of schooling, we have been imprinted by the "cultural template" of the conventional description of ELA.

When I use the term *conventional*, I refer to the same kind of perspective that the drunken fellow I introduced at the beginning of Chapter 1 not so subtly expressed. That is to say, the conventional description is the taken-for-granted perception and expectation based on experience and repetition. This conventional description is not the same as the intentional clinging to traditional standards that neoconservatives value and intentionally seek in order to return to a more glorious, moral time with a shared cultural experience. Secondary ELA's conventional description is, rather, one rooted in personal and collective experience, where teachers instruct students in the use of Standard edited English grammar and language in their speech and one where students write about and read the same canonical literature that has always been taught in American high school English classrooms. Perhaps the strength of this conventional description and my comfort with its practices are why, as I noted in Chapter 1, most people know exactly what a high school student means when she says she is taking English.

One need only explore what Foucault (1977/1980b) called "local memories" (p. 83) to recognize the power of the template of the conventional description of ELA. For example, in Chapter 1, I relayed the story of the man at the bar who chastised me because he felt that we English teachers do not teach students proper grammar, a fact made clear to him by the grammatical mistakes he saw in local newspaper articles. The drunken man's insistence on ELA's role in ensuring correct ways of speaking and writing and his assumption that English teachers are not teaching as well as teachers in the past vividly illustrate how certain he was about the conventional description of English. His assuredness about what commonly counts as English is frequently expressed to me, and what counts is static, as is demonstrated by the man in my second anecdote. Once while I was shopping at a bike store, the salesman, a former English major who knew I was a high school English teacher, told me that he could not believe the way

words are used now. I assumed he was referring to grammatical incorrectness in speaking, but he clarified that he meant that he completely disagreed with the addition of new words (e.g., Google, blog.) to the dictionary. In fact, the idea of the acceptance of these new words into something as sacred as the dictionary actually seemed to disgust him.

These two stories bear out two common perceptions of high school English, the first that what students do in high school English is very structured around correctness and usage (i.e., grammar, vocabulary) in speaking and writing and, second, that the content should not change over time. In other words, high school students today need to learn the same content (in the same way) that past high school students did – they need to learn the basics. Reflecting on Foucault, Butler (1992) wrote that “subjects who institute actions are themselves instituted effects of prior actions” (p. 10). Those who have performed ELA cannot recognize it performed any other way.

Summary

Power is productive, and a network of forces and a pattern of crisis and reform, not a linear progression, had the recursive movement to make the Common Core Standards thinkable. The prevalence of standards as the solution to perceived educational shortcomings reflects the market-based influence of neoliberalism. In its adjacency to neoliberalism, neoconservatism’s influence within a positivist framework enabled the Common Core to emerge as a redescription of ELA, an attempt to return to traditional notions of what can count as ELA’s core practices and knowledge. Many of the traditional players in education reform were involved in the development of the Common Core ELA Standards, but the hegemonic influence of neoliberalism made way for what Foucault (1977) called the “entry of the masked other” (p. 154), corporations and standards experts. Although the development and widespread acceptance of the Common Core has been called commonsense and natural, what is truly perceived as natural is ELA itself

as corporate influence hastened the writing of its national definition and standards experts rather than content and pedagogical experts held the pen.

CHAPTER 3

PREPARING FOR ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT: CONCEPTS AND DOCUMENTS

In the preceding chapters I introduced Foucaultian genealogy as an historical analytic and briefly explained its usefulness for this project as I looked for the conditions that made the Common Core possible. The purpose of this chapter is to explain how I used Foucault's concepts to describe the Common Core ELA Standards' descriptions of secondary ELA and the secondary ELA student. I begin by introducing the key concepts I used and that are important to understand within a Foucaultian genealogical study. Finally, because Foucaultian genealogy is an analysis of documents, I describe the Common Core ELA Standards documents that I closely read and analyzed using Foucaultian concepts as an analytic to describe the school subject and student they enable.

Foucaultian Concepts

Because Foucaultian genealogy is an analysis of documents, I operationalized Foucaultian concepts in my analysis of Common Core documents. In short, I used Foucaultian concepts to think about the Common Core ELA Standards documents as descriptions of secondary ELA and the ELA student. Specifically, I used three concepts – *power*, *discourse*, and *truth* – to think through the Common Core Standards as descriptions of ELA the school subject. In addition to those concepts, I used *discipline* and *subject* as *objects of knowledge* to think about the Common Core's discursive production of the ELA student.

Power

Although Foucault would resist labels such as *poststructuralist*, his work reflected poststructuralist notions of history and power. Whereas, according to St. Pierre (2000), “much of the work of humanism has been to define the essence of things, to get at that single, unique factor that enables one to identify something or someone and group it out of randomness, accident, and chaos” (p. 478), poststructuralism rejects the notion of essence. As Britzman (1995) noted, “poststructuralist critiques begin with assumptions of historicity” (p. 230). In other words, everything, even concepts and human subjects, has a history. Everything is discursively produced by networks of power. For Foucault, Crotty (1998) pointed out, “there is no standing back from this power and the discourses it effects” (p. 205). In this section I explain Foucault’s descriptions of power, and in the next section I explain his understanding of discourse.

From a Foucaultian perspective, power has two unique features. The first is that it does not reside in a particular place or with a particular person. Power is “everywhere not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 93). Power is constantly moving and being produced because it is “the multiplicity of force relations” (p. 92). For instance, the government undoubtedly has power in education. After all, schools are run by the government, the government funds schools, and the government creates school policy. However, the government is only one source of power because power moves through other institutions and individuals. Government produces certain mechanisms of power such as standards and material structures (e.g., buildings, schedules, systems of accountability), but power also moves among and from teachers as mechanisms of power who take up and play out government mandates in various ways. Foucault (1977/1980b) wrote that

power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. (p. 98)

In short, power does not begin or end with anyone but moves through discursive networks.

The second unique feature of Foucault's notion of power is that power is productive. When Foucault (1976/1990) referred to power, which he defined primarily as "the multiplicity of force relations" (p. 92), he referred to it as productive rather than repressive. Thinking of power only as repressive did not make sense. If power were only repressive, top-down, then Foucault (1977/1980a) could not see why anyone would want to obey it: "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (p. 119). Power, then, is not held in a centralized or hierarchical way and thus something to be avoided. It is not the root of all evil. Power can indeed constrain, but more significantly, it can create.

Discourse

Foucault (1971/1972) described discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 49). Scott (1988) offered a broader description of discourse, referring to it as "not a language or a text but a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (p. 35). Asking essentializing questions such as what discourse is, however, is not as productive as asking how discourse functions (Bové, 1990). Bové wrote that

Discourses produce knowledge about humans and their society. But since the "truths" of these discourses are relative to the disciplinary structures, the logical framework in which

they are institutionalized, they can have no claim upon us except that derived from the authority and legitimacy, the power, granted to or acquired by institutionalized discourses in question. (p. 56)

Because Foucault (1976/1990) identified discourse as where “power and knowledge are joined together” (p. 100), he positioned discourse not only as something that power produces but as something that has the power to produce. Discourses function as producers of knowledge by naming what is true.

Foucault (1980a) wrote that “truth is a thing of this world. It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power” (p. 131). An object – be it a concept, a subject, or a discipline does not exist until something is said and taken as true about it. Discourses create an object of knowledge by taking up statements about the object as either “true” or “false” and by confronting “how power constructs truth-producing systems in which propositions, concepts, and representations generally assign value and meaning to the objects of the various disciplines that treat them” (Bové, 1990, p. 57). Objects of knowledge could be anything from sexuality to punishment or even an academic discipline or student. Statements have been taken up as true about these objects of knowledge; therefore, the objects come into existence. In other words, they can be talked about and acted upon because a “truth-producing system” (Bové, p. 57) has been built around them. Foucault (1977/1980a) described régimes of truth as

the types of discourse which [society] accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the

means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(p. 131)

There is, for example, a régime of truth regarding education. Tyack and Cuban (1995) noted that “most Americans have been to school and know what a ‘real school’ is like. Congruence with that cultural template has helped maintain the legitimacy of the institution in the minds of the public” (p. 9). Students learn the discourse of school and become adept at what Pope (2001) referred to as “doing school” as much as they learn about the various school subjects. That is to say, students learn what counts as education, what education looks like, and what educated people know and do. The discourse of school, then, has not only produced what counts as school but has also enabled the discursive production of school as natural.

Understanding discourse, then, is necessary for determining the enabling, formative conditions of the present. What is taken as true becomes natural because, as Foucault (1977) wrote, “truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history” (p. 144). In other words, a discursive production of something (e.g., what counts as school) that goes fundamentally unchallenged and is constantly reproduced by what it produces (e.g., students) becomes so rigid and fixed as true that changing it becomes almost impossible. Barrett (1991) explained, however, that

[Foucault’s concept of discourse] enables us to understand how what is said fits into a network that has its own history and conditions of existence (albeit very different ones from the categories that historians or philosophers or other academics have traditionally used). (p. 126)

In other words, Foucault's discourse situates what is taken as true and self-evident in an historical context. Bové (1990) pointed out that this different understanding of discourse "allows us to describe: the 'self-evident' and 'common sensical' are what have the privilege of unnoticed power, and this power produces instruments of control" (p. 54). One of those instruments of control is a *discipline*.

Objects of Knowledge

Disciplines.

Institutional discourses take the form of disciplines because, as Bové (1990) noted, "'discourse' makes possible disciplines and institutions which, in turn, sustain and distribute those discourses" (p. 57). A discourse functions as a cultural template molded from truth statements that create and perpetuate disciplines such as high school ELA. In other words, the meaning, the truth of ELA becomes fixed within a discursive régime, "the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements" (Foucault, 1977/1980a, p.113). Whereas a régime of truth consists of the truth statements that are taken up to create an object of knowledge, a discursive régime is the effect of those statements' productive power. Part of the work of this project is to uncover the régime of truth, the truth statements that have been taken up, to explore the other truth statements they have enabled, and to theorize how they now function as a discursive régime to discipline the school subject ELA and its student subjects.

Disciplines are not simply objective, unchanging ways of thinking about a particular topic. They not only "have their own discourse" but are also "the bearers of discourse" (Foucault, 1977/1980b, p. 106). Because of this relationship between discourse and power, a discipline, then, is "both a field of study and a system of control" (Prado, 2000, p. 25). In other words, disciplines as bearers of discourse control knowledge production by controlling what

counts as truth. That is to say, disciplines “engender...apparatuses of knowledge (*savoir*) and a multiplicity of new domains of understanding. They are extraordinarily inventive participants in the order of these knowledge-producing apparatuses” (Foucault, p. 106). A discipline like ELA, then, is productive via its discursive power to determine what can be said as true about the discipline and to enable a particular kind of student. The creation of disciplines is significant because the connection of these disciplines to powerful social institutions (e.g., prisons, schools, hospitals) has material consequences: “Such institutions can control our bodies and actions” (Bové, 1990).

Subjects.

Strozier (2002) noted that Foucault used the term *individual* to refer to the “human material entity,” which he considered “the stage prior to becoming a subject, that is a *cultural* subject” (p. 9). Foucault (1982) foregrounded his historical study of the production of the individual as a subject when he said that “[his] objective...has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (p. 777). Individuals as subjects, then, do not possess power; they are created by it and transmit it. In other words, there is no acting subject but, rather, a discursively produced subject. Individuals are actually a product of power:

The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (Foucault, 1977/1980b, p. 98)

Foucault's perception of the culturally and historically constituted subject reflects a poststructural notion of the subject, which St. Pierre (2000) noted when she wrote that "in poststructural theories, the subject is considered a construction, and identity is presumed to be created in the ongoing effects of relations and in response to society's codes" (p. 503). The ELA student subject is, then, a constructed identity, one who, as this study shows, the Common Core ELA Standards discursively produces.

Documents

Foucault (1977) explained that "genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary" (p. 139). Foucaultian genealogy relies on the same resources that traditional historical analyses rely on for documentation. A Foucaultian genealogist draws from a variety of discursive and material sources that Foucault (1971/1972) noted to include "books, texts, accounts, registers, acts, buildings, institutions, laws, techniques, objects, customs, etc." (p. 7). Prado (2000) described sources to include "the archives, chronicles, diaries, journals, logbooks, memoirs, official records, and registries that are the historian's raw material" (p. 40). This list proved useful as I set out to find relevant documents for this project.

My second guiding question for this project asked how the Common Core State ELA Standards describe secondary ELA and the ELA student they enable. To answer this question that focuses on the Common Core as the most current description of ELA and the ELA student, I used only the ELA Standards and Common Core's documents as well some of the ELA Standards' lead writers' presentation transcripts as my primary sources. The purpose of the next few sections is to describe the documents I used.

Common Core ELA Standards Documents

The most comprehensive resource for Common Core information is a website entitled *Common Core State Standards Initiative: Preparing America's students for college and career* sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Common Core, 2010d). Despite the proliferation of documents reporting and commenting on the Common Core upon its completion, I decided to focus on the documents at this site for much of my work, most notably my work in the present, because I determined to take an as-is approach by using the documents that the Common Core's writers produced and that teachers will use in the classroom to directly guide instruction and produce ELA students. In the next section I first describe the Common Core ELA Standards themselves as well as the supplementary documents I used that were published with the standards. I end the section by describing other documents I used from the one of Common Core ELA Standards' lead writers, David Coleman, founder of Student Achievement Partners.

The Common Core State Standards for English language arts.

The Common Core includes standards for math and ELA. ELA standards are divided into two parts, one for ELA itself and the other for literacy in other subject areas including science, history/social studies, and technical subjects. The ELA standards consist of four content strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. In addition to being organized by content strand, the Common Core ELA standards are divided by grade-level. The Common Core contains ELA standards for each grade level for grades K-8, but pairs high school standards into two grade-level pairs, grades 9-10 and grades 11-12. This dissertation focuses only on the secondary grade-level pairs, 9-10 and 11-12.

Each content strand has two sets of standards, the first being College and Career Readiness Standards (CCR), also called anchor standards⁷. Six to ten anchor standards make up each set of anchor standards and describe the knowledge and skills an end-of-senior-year ELA student who has mastered all the standards should have. For example, the first of the ten anchor standard for the writing strand is “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 41). Accompanying each set of anchor standards is a paragraph-long note providing a brief rationale for the strand’s standards. In short, each Common Core strand is introduced by anchor standards that describe what students should know and be able to do and a note that summarizes why. The paragraph accompanying the writing strands’ ten anchor standards follows:

For students, writing is a key means of asserting and defending claims, showing what they know about a subject, and conveying what they have experienced, imagined, thought, and felt. To be college- and career ready writers, students must take task, purpose, and audience into careful consideration, choosing words, information, structures, and formats deliberately. They need to know how to combine elements of different kinds of writing—for example, to use narrative strategies within argument and explanation within narrative—to produce complex and nuanced writing. They need to be able to use technology strategically when creating, refining, and collaborating on writing. They have to become adept at gathering information, evaluating sources, and citing material accurately, reporting findings from their research and analysis of sources in a

⁷ Throughout this dissertation I use the phrase *anchor standards* to refer to the College and Career Readiness Standards.

clear and cogent manner. They must have the flexibility, concentration, and fluency to produce high-quality first draft text under a tight deadline as well as the capacity to revisit and make improvements to a piece of writing over multiple drafts when circumstances encourage or require it. (Common Core, p. 41)

While the anchor standards are the same for grades K-12, the rationale note distinguishes the different purposes for grades K-5 and 6-12 standards. For example, the note for the K-5 reading anchor standards establishes the standards for those grade levels as a means to “build a foundation for college and career readiness,” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 10) whereas the grades 6-12 Reading anchor standards note that students must “become college and career ready” (Common Core, p. 35).

The second set of standards for each content strand is the grade-specific standards. Although the anchor standards for grades 9-12 are the same, the grade-specific standards differ from one grade pair to the next. The grade-specific standards’ purpose is to “translate the broad (and, for the earliest grades, seemingly distant) aims of the [anchor] standards into age- and attainment-appropriate terms” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3). According to the Common Core, the grade-specific standards build upon one another so that students who master them all meet the anchor standards for college and career readiness.

The Common Core introductory documents.

Throughout the remainder of this dissertation, when I use the phrase I *Common Core documents*, I am referring to supplemental documents published with the standards themselves. These documents are found at the Common Core website (Common Core, 2010d) under the link *English Language Arts Standards*. Clicking on *Download the Common Core State Standards* leads to a sixty-six page PDF file containing the standards and supplemental documents. The

following list names and summarizes the sections of the Common Core PDF file that I used and refer to as *Common Core documents*:

The Introduction to the Common Core State Standards from the CCSSO and NGA
(Common Core, 2010e).

This one-page document is the NGA's and CCSSO's official introduction to the Common Core from June 2, 2010, the day NGA and CCSSO introduced the Common Core to the nation. The introduction includes a statement of what the math and ELA Standards represent: "a set of expectations for student knowledge and skills that high school graduates need to succeed in college and careers" (para. 1). The introduction also acknowledges the contributions of groups generally such as "educators, content experts, researchers, national organizations, and community groups" (para. 2). Although the document provides links to information about the criteria and considerations for the standards, the introduction includes a bulleted summary of the criteria for developing the K-12 standards. The criteria are as follows:

- Aligned with college and work expectations
- Include rigorous content *and* application of knowledge through high-order thinking skills
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards
- Informed by top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society
- Evidence and/or research-base. (para. 3)

The introduction ends with an acknowledgment of possible changes or additions to the standards based on new learning about "the most essential knowledge for student success" (para. 4).

The Introduction to the ELA Common Core Standards (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3).

This first document within the ELA Standards is a one-page introduction to the ELA Standards. The introduction summarizes the Common Core ELA Standards' purpose, sources, criteria, structure, and intended outcomes. The introduction describes the ELA Standards as an "effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K-12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school" (para. 1). According to the introduction, the standards are based on several factors, including existing states' and other nations' standards as well as feedback from political, business, academic, and individual entities. Echoing the preceding introduction to the Common Core Standards as a whole, the Common Core ELA Standards' introduction describes the Standards in terms of the criteria listed above, although it does not mention the influence of already existing state standards or of higher-order thinking skills on the ELA Standards' development. According to the introduction, "a particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that its mastery was essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first century, globally competitive environment" (para. 3). The document then explains that the "backbone" (para. 4) of the ELA standards is the College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards, which are based on an earlier NGA- and CCSSO-sponsored project. The ELA Standards also include grade-specific K-12 standards in five content areas called *strands* – reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The grade-specific standards "translate the broad (and, for the earliest grades, seemingly distant) aims of the CCR standards into age- and attainment-appropriate terms" (para. 4).

The Common Core ELA Standards' introduction explains the Common Core's inclusion of literacy standards for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects: "Just as students

must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so too must the Standards specify the literacy skills and understandings for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines.” (para. 5). The last section of the Common Core ELA Standards’ introduction indirectly states that the ELA Standards are the Common Core’s definition of literacy by saying that they “lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century” (para. 6).

Key design considerations (Common Core, 2010a, pp. 4-5).

The considerations page explains the design and purpose of the anchor standards and the grade-specific standards with the most direct purpose being to work together “to define the college and career readiness line” (para. 1). Also addressed in this two-page section is how the Common Core allows for flexibility and input at the state, local, and classroom level. More specifically, the division of the secondary standards into grade pairs rather than individual grades and the expression of the standards as achievements should, according to the Common Core, allow for flexibility. The considerations page posits that mandating student achievements rather than specific pedagogical strategies honors the professionalism of teachers.

The considerations section also addresses the place of research and the model of literacy within the Common Core ELA Standards. According to this section, “research and media skills and understanding are embedded throughout the Standards rather than treated in a separate section” (para. 6). Similarly, the Common Core expresses an expectation that the content strands not be addressed specifically because “often, several standards can be addressed by a single rich task” (para. 12). Although not directly defined, literacy with an emphasis on informational texts is the “shared responsibility” (para. 7) of ELA and other content-area teachers. The Common Core cites the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to support the Common

Core’s claim of informational texts’ importance for college and career readiness. The Common Core, “in accord with NAEP’s growing emphasis on informational texts in the higher grades...demand that a significant amount of reading of informational texts take place inside and outside the ELA classroom” (para. 10). The design section also uses NAEP as an influence on the writing the Common Core emphasizes with “the overwhelming focus of writing throughout high school [being] on arguments and informative/explanatory texts” (para. 11).

What is not covered in the Standards (Common Core, 2010a, p. 6).

According to this one-page section, the Common Core ELA Standards have “intentional design limitations” (para. 1) that are enumerated in this section. One limitation is that the standards cannot address all content or all that “can or should be taught” (paras. 1 and 2). The Common Core ELA standards, then, must be “complemented by a content-rich curriculum consistent with the expectations laid out in this document” (para. 1). This section also acknowledges that the Standards do not define “advanced work for students who meet the Common Core ELA Standards prior to the end of high school” (para. 3) or define “intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations” (para. 4). Likewise, the Standards do not “define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs” (para. 5), although “all students must have the same opportunity to learn and meet the same high expectations if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post-high school lives” (para. 5). Finally, this section includes a paragraph that acknowledges that “[the Standards] do not define the whole of [college and career] readiness” (para. 8).

Students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7).

This section is the only introductory document that focuses solely on students. The document does not, however, describe students in K-12 classrooms but provides “a portrait of students who meet the standards set out in this document” (para. 1). This one-page discursive portrait describes the students who meet the standards in terms of the “capacities of a literate individual” (para. 1). In other words, according to the document, the reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language Common Core Standards define literacy, and the document describes what students who have the literacy skills described in the Common Core ELA Standards should have the capacity to do once they have finished high school and mastered the ELA Standards. The capacities include demonstrating independence; building content knowledge; responding to audience, task, purpose, and discipline; comprehending and critiquing; valuing evidence; using technology and digital media; and understanding other perspectives and cultures. Each of these capacities is followed by a paragraph-long explanation of what skills and dispositions the capacity entails. It is important to note that although these capacities are the intended result of the mastery of the Common Core, the standards themselves do not have an explicitly stated correlation to the capacities, and the capacities do not serve as the framing structure of the standards. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to this document often and describe it in more detail because of its focus on the intended student product of the Common Core ELA Standards.

How to read this document (Common Core, 2010a, p. 8).

This one-page document is a user’s guide for reading the Common Core ELA Standards, beginning with an explanation of the standards’ organization. This document also explains that each section of the standards is divided into the four content strands and explains what anchor

standards and grade-specific standards do and how they are structured. The document then notes that ELA teachers and content area teachers share responsibility for the anchor standards in reading and writing. Finally, the document describes the key features of each strand. For reading, the key feature is a “grade-by-grade ‘staircase’ of increasing text complexity that rises from beginning reading to the college and career readiness level” (para. 6). The writing section highlights “the importance of the writing-reading connection by requiring students to draw upon and write about evidence from literary and informational texts” (para. 7). In the speaking and listening strand, the standards emphasize “a range of broadly useful oral and communication and interpersonal skills” (para. 8). The Language standards have three emphases: “conventions, effective use, and vocabulary,” with the focus of vocabulary being the acquisition of “general academic and domain-specific words and phrases” (para. 9). Finally the section provides an overview of the appendices.

Appendices A (Common Core, 2010b) and B (Common Core, 2010c).

The Common Core documents include three appendices. For this study, I used only Appendix A and Appendix B. The third appendix, Appendix C, consists of student writing samples and did not contribute to the Common Core’s description of ELA in a way that was useful in my analysis. Appendix A provides rationales and research for each content strand. For example, in this appendix the standards writers justify the standards’ focus on text complexity by citing a gap between the complexity of texts students must read in high school and the texts students must read in college. The writers also cite different expectations regarding reading narrative texts in high school and expository texts in college as a reason to focus on increasing levels of text complexity at each grade level. Appendix A also includes the standards’ approach to determining text complexity, which includes a three-part model that consists of qualitative

dimensions, quantitative dimensions, and reader/task considerations. Accompanying the model are excerpts from sample texts and annotations that explain how the sample's complexity could be determined in each component of the model.

Appendix B consists of a list of sample texts and sample performance tasks. The list of sample texts is for the ELA as well as for science, history/social studies, and technical subjects. According to the Common Core, the texts are not required reading but are “suggestive of the breadth of texts that students should encounter in the text types required by the Standards” (Common Core, 2010c, p. 2). Accompanying the lists is a set of performance tasks. These tasks, prefaced by excerpts from sample texts, demonstrate the application of the Common Core ELA Standards to the exemplar texts.

Transcripts.

I explained earlier that in an effort to describe the school and student subject the standards enable I chose to focus solely on the Common Core ELA Standards and the ELA Standards documents because I wanted to take an as-is approach without outside commentary. I also chose to use transcripts from the Common Core ELA Standards' writers' presentations. Although these transcripts are not a part of the official documents, they provide further explanation of the reasoning behind the standards as well as demonstrations of how the writers expect the standards to be taught in schools. For example, one of the transcripts I used was from a talk given by David Coleman (2011a), one of the ELA standards' lead writers. In this presentation to New York educators, Coleman explains the standards and then demonstrates a sample lesson using Martin Luther King Jr.'s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Although the transcript of this talk and demonstration lesson are not an official part of the Common Core

documents, they offer an explanation of them from one of their lead writers, and unlike the standards, these transcripts describe how teachers should use the standards in their classrooms.

Summary

To answer my questions regarding how the Common Core ELA Standards describe ELA and the ELA student and how that description became possible, I used Foucauldian genealogy to analyze the Common Core Standards documents and other related works. For this analysis I operationalized Foucaultian concepts such as discourse, power, truth, power, discipline, and subject. In the next chapter I explain how I operationalized these concepts and what I discovered through my analysis.

CHAPTER 4

THE COMMON CORE'S DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF SECONDARY ELA AND THE ELA STUDENT

My task in analysis for this project was to use Foucaultian genealogy to analyze relevant documents in order to answer my two research questions: (a) What are the conditions that enabled the Common Core State ELA Standards' descriptions of secondary ELA and the ELA student? and (b) How do the Common Core State ELA Standards describe secondary ELA and the ELA student? In Chapter 2, I explored the events that made the Common Core's current description of ELA and the ELA student not only thinkable but also widely accepted as the next normal, obvious, and desirable progression. Mahon (1992) wrote that "the genealogist traces the history of the present in order to undermine the self-evidences of the present" (p. 85). Because Foucaultian genealogy's purpose is to disrupt that which is taken as natural (Bové, 1990), I used genealogy to disrupt the notion that the Common Core is the natural, common-sense description of ELA and the ELA student.

In this chapter, I address my second research question, which is focused on the Common Core as ELA's and the ELA student's present description. As I address the question, I explain how I used Foucault's concepts – *discourse*, *power*, *truth*, *objects of knowledge*, *discipline*, and *subject* – to analyze the Common Core ELA Standards, supplementary documents published with the Common Core, and transcripts of presentations given by one of the Common Core ELA Standards' writers. Bové (1990) asserted that "key terms are finally more important for their function, for their place within intellectual practices, than they are for what they may be said to

‘mean’ in the abstract” (p. 51). Therefore, I examined how the key Foucaultian concepts function within the Common Core. In this chapter I describe what I did in each step of analysis and then what kind of school subject and human subject the Common Core ELA Standards enable.

To determine how the Common Core describes secondary ELA and enables a certain kind of ELA student, I operationalized Foucault’s notion of discourse (1971/1972), which he defined as the “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 49). Prado (2000) summarized genealogy’s purpose to be “to grasp the formative power of discourses and disciplines” (p. 57). The Common Core has productive power because it functions as and incites a discourse that produces two objects of knowledge: the discipline ELA and the human subject, the ELA student. The formative power of the Common Core ELA Standards’ discourse is the focus of this chapter.

I took three steps to explore the Common Core ELA Standards’ descriptions, the first focusing on what the Common Core claims as true about the discipline ELA. These truth claims are important because they position their description of ELA as the solution to the perceived problem of ELA students’ lack of college and career readiness. I then explain how the Common Core ELA Standards describe and produce the ELA student subject. Because what counts as ELA is what students are expected to know and do, I analyzed how the Common Core’s discourse prescribes the knowledge and practices that produce the human subject, the ELA student, and discipline how, when, and upon what the ELA student acts.

The Truth about ELA’s Purpose: The Literacy Capacity for College and Career Readiness

Ryan (2006) wrote that “a discourse is a web of statements, categories and beliefs, habits and practices” (p. 22). The National Governors Association (NGA), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and the Common Core’s writers assert two truth claims about ELA’s

purpose, content, and structure. The claims are that (a) the singular purpose of secondary ELA is to prepare students with literacy for future college and career readiness and (b) secondary ELA is defined by a core of skills and knowledge that is most clearly articulated in an age-specific sequence. These statements regarding ELA function as the Common Core ELA Standards' régime of truth that the developers and writers believed and "accept[ed] and [made] function as true" (Foucault, 1971/1972, p. 131). This régime of truth makes the Common Core ELA Standards' description of ELA possible.

I explored how the Common Core's régime of truth produces and is reproduced by the Common Core's discourse by identifying the broad truth statements that make the specific descriptions possible. Bové (1990) wrote about "[discourse's] existence as an institutionalized system for the production of knowledge in regulated language" (p. 53). I, therefore, used the language of the Common Core ELA Standards' introductory and supporting documents as evidence of each truth claim. The National Governors Association's and the Council of Chief State School Officers' strategy is to describe, based on their truth claims, what counts as ELA and an ELA student in such a way that their descriptions seem natural, inevitable, and self-evident. As Foucault (1976/1990) noted, however, "there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy" (p. 102). To disrupt the self-evidence of the Common Core ELA Standards, I examined how the language and structure of the Common Core sometimes contradict what the National Governors Association, the Chief Council of State School Officers, and Common Core developers claim to be true.

ELA's Neoliberal Purpose: The Literacy Capacity for College and Career Readiness

The Common Core ELA Standards have two introductions, one introducing the project as a whole and the other introducing the ELA Standards specifically. The NGA and CCSSO clearly

use the project’s mission statement to state the motivation behind and purpose of the Common Core State Standards Initiative as a whole:

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy. (Common Core, 2010d, “Mission statement,” para. 1)

This introductory statement reflects neoliberalism’s continuing hegemonic influence on education and its purpose. According to this introductory excerpt, the Common Core’s sole purpose is to prepare students for college and career success within the context of a global economy in a way that is clear, streamlined, rigorous, relevant, and competitive. Reflecting the Common Core’s overarching mission, its specific ELA standards' mission is to “lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3). The purpose of the Common Core ELA Standards, then, is to affirm literacy practices necessary for competition in the global economy.

These two mission statements denote the Common Core’s first truth claim regarding the school subject, ELA, which is that ELA’s sole purpose is to ready students with 21st century literacy as defined by the Common Core ELA Standards so that upon successful completion of high school, students will be ready for entrance into college and/or career. Unlike state standards such as the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), which never identifies literacy as a goal or a function of secondary ELA, the ELA Common Core succinctly connects mastery of the

commonsense ELA standards (i.e., literacy) to success in college and career by stating that the standards were created “in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3). Myers (1996) noted that how literacy is defined and valued drives who we are as teachers and students of ELA; how ELA teachers, students, and content are constructed; and what counts as knowledge in the field of ELA. The scope and complexity of literacy’s definition and role shapes ELA’s discourse. Despite the Common Core’s acknowledgement of literacy’s importance in the field of ELA, the word *literacy* is rarely and vaguely used within the Common Core documents and is never used within the Common Core ELA Standards themselves. In fact, literacy is absent from the “Glossary of key terms” in Appendix A, which is “limited to those words and phrases particularly important to the Standards and that have a meaning unique to this document” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 42). Literacy’s omission from the glossary demonstrates that even though the Common Core’s writers name literacy as a purpose for the ELA standards, they consider literacy’s meaning to be so obvious and natural that it requires no explanation.

The most prominent use of the term literacy is in the title of one distinct set of standards within the Common Core. These standards, the only ones actually referred to as “literacy standards” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3), are not, ironically, the ELA standards and are not, according to the Common Core’s introductory materials, the responsibility of ELA teachers. The “literacy standards” are actually for subjects other than ELA:

The Standards set requirements not only for English language arts (ELA) but also for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Just as students must learn to read, write, speak, listen and use language effectively in a variety of content

areas, so too must the Standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines. (Common Core, p. 3)

Considering the Common Core's valuation of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and using language as literacy skills, one could deduce that the Common Core considers the ELA standards to be its description of literacy. The only anchor standards ELA and the other subject areas (i.e., history/social studies, science, and technical subjects) share, however, are the content strands for reading and writing. The "literacy standards" do not include speaking and listening or language standards. In short, then, literacy in the Common Core is reading and writing, which, as I explain later in this chapter, the Common Core ELA Standards describe in very specific ways.

As the quote above illustrates, the Common Core deploys a broad but vague definition of literacy. For example, within the Common Core's introductory documents is a section entitled "Students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language," which the Common Core writers describe as a "portrait of students who meet the standards set out in this document" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7). In short, the section describes the graduating ELA student. This section notes that people who have "advance[d] through the grades and master[ed] the standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language . . . are able to exhibit with increasing fullness and regularity the capacities of the literate individual" (Common Core, p. 7). This statement is interesting in its inclusion of speaking, listening, and language standards as attributes of literacy even though, as I noted previously, the literacy standards for subject areas other than ELA exclude speaking, listening, and language. This statement is also important because it introduces the concept of *capacities* to which I refer often throughout this project. In this statement the Common Core explains what the developers

consider to be the capacities of a literate person and assume a humanist subject with core capacities.

Regardless of the skills necessary for or the means of acquiring these capacities, the developers of the Common Core ELA Standards name the following as the “capacities of the literate individual” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7):

- They demonstrate independence.
- They build strong content knowledge.
- They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline,
- They comprehend as well as critique.
- They value evidence.
- They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
- They come to understand other perspectives and cultures. (Common Core, p. 7)

In contrast, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2008), embracing multiple literacies, acknowledged an ever-changing definition of literacy by saying that “as society and technology change, so does literacy” (para. 1). NCTE (2008) proposed the following description of 21st century literacies:

Twenty-first century readers and writers need to

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes
- Manage, analyze and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information

- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multi-media texts
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments. (para.

1)

Similarities and differences exist between the Common Core's and NCTE's two descriptions, as they both contextualize literacy within the demands of living in the 21st century. Both sets of standards work from the assumption that the prospect of living and working in the 21st century necessitates a particular understanding of literacy and, thus, a particular ELA experience in K-12 schooling. NCTE, like the Common Core, acknowledged reading and writing as primary literacy areas. The most notable difference between the two, however, is that the Common Core reflects neoliberalism's market-based production of the student as a competitive individual by promoting independence and a positivist emphasis on comprehension, content knowledge, and evidence. The Common Core ELA Standards' explanation of the "capacities of the literate individual" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7) reflects the influence of neoliberalism's discursive régime on the production of what counts as literacy. The Common Core's capacities of the literate individual include demonstrating independence and building strong content knowledge among others (Common Core, p. 7). NCTE, on the other hand, stressed the importance of multiple literacies, relationships, and ethics. Whereas NCTE addressed 21st century literacy in terms of how students create and use communication individually and collaboratively within the context of new technology and a variety of texts, the Common Core addresses 21st century literacy in terms of the individual acquisition of literacy within the context of future success in both college and career. In short, the Common Core standards produce students who respond but create little.

Even though the Common Core makes no explicit link between the "capacities of the literate individual" (Common Core, p. 7) and its grade-specific ELA standards, I anticipated

finding in the Common Core ELA Standards the same actions and practices used in what the Common Core counts as literacy capacities, much in the same way one would expect to see reflections of a lesson's goals in a summative assessment. Surprisingly, many of the literacy practices described as the "capacities of the literate individual" (Common Core, p. 7) are notably absent in the ELA standards themselves. Given that the capacities in the Common Core's introductory materials are not aligned with the ELA standards, it's unclear how the graduate learns the skills of the "literate individual" throughout secondary ELA experiences. For example, several verbs used in the explanation of a literate person's capacities portray the graduate as someone who uses inquiry as a means of learning and understanding – *ask*, *seek*, *inquire*, and *question*, none of which is present in the anchor or grade-specific standards. The portrait also employs verbs that reflect the value of students being independent and self-directed. These verbs, including *respond* and *inhabit*, are also absent from the grade-specific standards. The verb *choose* is used only once in the language standards and *engage* appears twice but only in the writing standards. Finally, like the dispositional adverbs in the Common Core ELA Standards' introduction, the portrait uses verbs that reflect students' dispositions. These verbs include *appreciate* and *value*, neither of which appears in the standards.

ELA's Sequential Core

Whereas the Common Core's first truth claim names its ELA standards' purpose, the second addresses its content and structure, which embraces the humanist notions of linearity and progress. As their title reflects, the Common Core ELA Standards represent the National Governors Association's and the Council of Chief State School Officers' assumption that ELA has a common core of knowledge and skills. The Common Core as ELA's current description can only be possible if the following truth claim is assumed: ELA is defined by core,

fundamental knowledge and skills that, although interrelated, are most clearly articulated in separate, linear, sequenced strands. In the Common Core's ELA Standards' introduction, the developers refer to the Common Core ELA Standards as "the foundation of any creative and purposeful expression in language" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3), although as I noted earlier the capacities do not promote creativity or personal expression. Later, the developers say that "the aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals" (Common Core, p. 6). These statements convey two important points. The first point is that the ELA Standards contain ELA's core, foundational skills and knowledge but do not include *all* ELA skills and knowledge. That is to say, if the Common Core ELA Standards are the foundation, then there are more ELA skills and content to learn. The Common Core further acknowledges this content by saying, "While the Standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can be taught" (Common Core, p. 6). According to the Common Core, to include more standards – to include "all that can be taught" – would be to "set out an exhaustive list or a set of restrictions that limits what can be taught beyond what is specified herein" (p. 6). In other words, the Common Core operates on the belief that ELA indeed has a core of knowledge and skills comprised of the Common Core ELA Standards that translate into economic success.

The second point the above statements make is that ELA standards will enable students to "meet college and career readiness no later than the end of high school" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 4); therefore, just the fundamentals – ELA's core skills and knowledge – will prepare students for future success. That is, mastery of ELA's core skills and knowledge will enable a student to be a literate individual, as defined by the Common Core (Common Core, p. 7). The implication is that all one needs for college and career readiness is ELA's fundamentals, its neoconservative core.

In Chapter 1, I explained that my former English department took what we believed Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum described as required knowledge and skills (e.g., what books we had in the book room and liked to use) and organized them so that the content and the order in which we taught it was very clear. Each grade-specific ELA teacher knew what literature, writing, and grammar/mechanics she was expected to teach. We not only desired clarity but also wanted to prepare students for the next grade, so we sequenced the content appropriately. The Common Core ELA Standards also reflect this future-driven orientation. Similar to the curriculum I helped create at my former school, the Common Core's focus is not the student in the moment but the student in the future, first in the next grade level and then in adulthood as a literate, competitive individual with certain Common Core-defined literacy capacities.

Although the Common Core's professed capacities of a literate individual in the 21st century are the intended goals for ELA students, the standards are not, as I noted earlier, organized by or aligned to those goals. Instead, the Common Core standards are organized by content strands – reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language – somewhat representing the traditional metaphorical “tripod” of English – language, literature, and composition (Applebee, 1974). The content strands' importance to the Common Core's developers is evidenced by their linking the standards to college and career readiness.

Although the Common Core presents ELA's content in separate core strands, the expressed expectation is that teachers will integrate them appropriately: “While the Standards delineate specific expectations in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language, each standard need not be a separate focus for instruction and assessment” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 5). The explanatory note accompanying the language anchor standards indicates a similar expectation, stating that the language standards are “inseparable” from the other strands,

although this acknowledgement did not preclude the language standards from, in fact, being articulated as a separate strand. No explanation is offered regarding the reason for the content strands, and there is no guarantee that teachers will, in fact, integrate the various content strands' standards.

In addition to being organized by the content strands reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language, the Common Core ELA Standards are organized by grade-level. The Common Core provides standards for each grade level for grades K-8, but divides into two grade-level bands grades 9-10 and grades 11-12⁸. Each strand, then, has 6-10 anchor standards that describe the knowledge and skills an end-of-senior-year ELA student who has mastered all the standards should have: "Grade-specific K–12 standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language translate the broad (and, for the earliest grades, seemingly distant) aims of the [anchor] standards into age- and attainment-appropriate terms" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3). The order in which the Common Core requires students to master ELA skills, however, is often randomly sequenced. Prado (2000) posited that "it is only the retrospective imposition of some historical interpretation that makes [disparate factors] appear to be more than coincidentally related" (p. 37). In many ways, the Common Core's sequential structure does just that – make disparate skills and understandings "appear to be more than coincidentally related" (Prado, p. 37).

Imposing the humanist assumption of linearity and progression on literacy learning even when the learning of one skill does not depend on prior learning of another skill, the Common

⁸ The last grade-level band is often referred to within the standards documents as 11-CCR, the acronym for the anchor standards, rather than 11-12, because once students master the band's standards, they have, theoretically, mastered the anchor standards.

Core states that the grade-specific standards are “a cumulative progression designed to enable students to meet college and career readiness expectations no later than the end of high school” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 4). Students are expected to “retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades” (Common Core, p. 4). Anchoring itself to the traditional structure of school, the Common Core forces literacy learning into the arbitrary 13 consecutive years of schooling. The Common Core offers no explanation of how its developers determined the “cumulative progression” and presents no evidence that the progression will lead to mastery of the anchor standards and the subsequent “capacities of a literate individual” (Common Core, p. 7), much less to college and career readiness. The logic of some of the standard’s sequence is apparent, especially in the elementary grade levels. On the other hand, many progressions do not make sense because what students learn in later grades does not necessarily depend on what they learn in earlier grades. For example, in grades 9-10 a reading standard requires students to “analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature” (Common Core, RL.9-10.6, p. 38). The corresponding grades 11-12 standard requires students to “analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement)” (Common Core, RL.11-12.6, p. 38). Not only does neither grade-specific standard address the corresponding anchor standard’s focus on comparing texts, but there is no skill or understanding expressed in RL.9-10.6 that is necessary to understand satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement, concepts that many students in earlier grades could understand and apply. Nothing about being in the eleventh or twelfth grade or being of that grade-level age uniquely qualifies someone to understand and react to satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement.

The language strand is comprised of three areas, “conventions of standard English,” “knowledge of language,” and “vocabulary acquisition and use” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 51). Although the conventions section expressly applies to writing and speaking, the Common Core presents it separately from those strands and includes it in the language strand. Supplementing the conventions’ sections is a chart labeled “Language progressive skills, by grade” (Common Core, p. 56) that outlines a progression of skills within the grade-specific Language standards. The chart lists various skills (e.g., subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, etc.) and recommends the grade in which teachers should address each specific skill and the grades in which they should no longer need to address them. Of the eighteen skills listed, only one – the use of parallel structure – is introduced in high school, which means that, according to the Common Core, the only new language convention students learn in high school is parallelism. Two skills are introduced in earlier grades and then not addressed in grades 9-12, because they are said to be subsumed by other standards. One of those skills is “us[ing] punctuation to separate items in a series” (Common Core, p. 56), which is said to be subsumed under the standard (L.9-10.1a) that requires students to use parallel structure. The other skill is “vary[ing] sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style” (Common Core, p. 56), which is said to be subsumed under the standard that asks students to “vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte’s *Artful Sentence*) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex sentences when reading” (Common Core, L.11-12.3a, p. 54). The Common Core offers no explanation as to how the order of the language skills came to be, why a skill is introduced at a certain grade level or is not, or why some skills require no attention at a certain point.

The Common Core ELA Standards can function as ELA's current discourse because they reflect the assumption that the following statements are true: ELA's sole purpose is to prepare students with 21st century literacy for success in college and career work, and ELA has a fundamental, age-bound sequential core of skills and knowledge. Despite these assumptions, however, the language and organization of the Common Core work counter to these claims. Although, as I explain in more detail later in this chapter, the Common Core ELA Standards offer narrow descriptions of what reading and writing practices are worthwhile, what they sometimes randomly sequence as secondary ELA's core literacy practices and knowledge echoes the past rather than heralds the 21st century. Although the Core is touted as a change in terms of what teachers will teach and students will learn for 21st readiness, what the ELA Standards require students to know and do is reminiscent of the past, or as the NCTE review team (2009) said of the ELA Common Core's first draft, they, "with few exceptions, could apply as well to the schools of 1950 as to the schools of this decade and the realities the nation and the world face today" (p. 3).

The Productive Power of the Common Core's Discourse

The Discursive Production of the School Subject ELA as a Discipline

To describe ELA is to inscribe a discipline. Foucault (1977/1995) asserted that a discipline such as ELA is not only a field of study but also a "technology of power" (p. 194). Academic disciplines like ELA, then, are more than conveyors of content – they are instruments and products of power. The productive power of a discipline stems from the fact that it has its "own discourse" (Foucault, 1977/1980b, p. 106) that "transmits and produces power" (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 100-101). The discipline ELA is the Common Core discourse's object of knowledge as well as a producer of knowledge itself. Academic disciplines as "bearers of

discourse” (Foucault, 1977/1980b, p. 106) function as systems of control because they have the power to discursively and materially control what counts as knowledge within a discipline by prescribing certain practices. The prescription of practices produces its student subject.

The creation of disciplines is significant because the connection of these disciplines to powerful social institutions (e.g., schools, prisons, hospitals) has material consequences for students. Students are disciplined in what they can say and do within and among certain discourses, disciplines, institutions, and their prescribed social practices. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, students are schooled in the discourse of school. They learn how to do school as much as they learn various school subjects. What happens in ELA courses illustrates this kind of accepted school discourse. Doing high school English has historically meant that students sit in desks while the teacher usually stands in front of them and manages the speech and actions of the class (i.e., what students read, what students write, what students discuss). In secondary ELA classes certain kinds of texts are read (e.g., Uniform Lists, the literary canon) and those texts are then talked and written about in certain ways (e.g., Reader Response, New Criticism). To those involved in secondary ELA (e.g., my former student), these descriptions *are* secondary ELA. How this discourse of secondary ELA functions and what it produces is a different story.

Rather than separately explain how the Common Core describes ELA’s “core” as a discipline and then explain how it describes the ELA student, I describe both by providing a description of the student in terms of how ELA, as described by the Common Core, disciplines and thus produces the student as an object of knowledge. To see the effects of discourse’s productive power, Foucault (1977/1980b) advocated beginning an historical search

at the point where [power] is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there – that is to say – where it installs itself and produces its real effects. (p. 97)

The Common Core ELA Standards' discourse "installs itself and produces its real effects" at the most local point – the student body. Foucaultian genealogy as effective history makes the body possible as the beginning point for historical study because, unlike traditional historians, Foucault (1977) advocated effective history that "shortens its vision to those things nearest to it – the body" (p. 155). Because of genealogy's focus on the body, Mahon (1992) pointed out that genealogy "has more in common with physiology than with philosophy and its tendency to deny the body" (p. 112). Genealogy as "a study of power in its external visage" (Foucault, 1977/1980b, p. 97) diagnoses the body to discover how it has been discursively produced.

Foucaultian genealogy is, in many respects, an historical study of discursive portraits from which the historian literally reads the imprint of a discourse's history on the present body. In the case of education, the "external visage" (Foucault, 1977/1980b, p. 97) under examination is the student's body produced by the discourses of academic disciplines. The Common Core offers the "capacities of a literate individual" as "a portrait of students who meet the standards set out in this document" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7), and the grade-level standards offer what might analogously be considered the yearly school portrait. A portrait as a static representation of the subject is an interesting metaphor for the ELA student because a portrait cannot convey more than one action, one moment in time, and it cannot convey what a person has the capacity to do.

Bové (1990) wrote that "'discourse' provides a privileged entry into the poststructuralist mode of analysis precisely because it is the organized and regulated, as well as the regulating and

constituting, functions of language that it studies” (p. 55). Because the Common Core ELA Standards offer a discursive portrait of the ELA student, I analyzed how the Common Core’s language functioned as its description of both the discipline ELA and, subsequently, the ELA student subject. I determined that the Common Core ELA Standards’ portrait metaphor is appropriate because Common Core’s discourse produces the ELA student as a docile body, which Foucault (1977/1995) described as one “that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (p. 136). Just as the recruits in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977) were subjected and transformed into soldiers, the Common Core seeks to subject and transform the human adolescent into the secondary ELA student with 21st literacy skills. In short, the Common Core ELA Standards’ discourse produces the student not as an acting subject but a subject acted upon to improve the student and ensure college and career readiness. Ironically, in its effort to do this, the Common Core makes a revolutionary move not by introducing something new but by revolving back to a positivist approach to knowledge and a traditional notion of reading and writing reflecting neoconservatism’s hegemonic influence.

In his speeches U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s references to students are similar to the Common Core’s with students acted upon and rarely acting independently or of their own volition. His speech to the American Diploma Project’s Leadership team (2010a) that I alluded to in Chapter 2 was not the first time he publicly referred to recent education reform efforts as a “quiet revolution.” He used the phrase several weeks earlier in a speech to the National Press Club. During this speech, Secretary Duncan (2010b) spoke often about students, but his speech’s syntax, like the Common Core ELA Standards’, positioned them as problematic passive objects. He used *students* as the subject of active voice sentences only twice, once to say that American students “trail ten other countries in math” (para. 43) and again to point out that

they “drop out of high school each year” (para. 35). According to Duncan, then, students are the present problem to be solved, and the Common Core Standards are the solution.

The Common Core ELA Standards are not about present students but students at the end of twelfth grade, the graduates, the “students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7). Reflecting positivism’s “reality” that “exists external to people” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5), who ELA students are or what they’re doing right now in classrooms does not seem to matter much. Kendall (2010, November) advocated a more student-centered approach, saying, “so, how can we dig deeper and ask: Where are students right now relative to the expectations of the Common Core” (p. 80)? Scholes (1998) likewise wrote that

the historical goal of English as a discipline should begin and end with where we – our students and ourselves – are now. What are the texts, the events, the ideas, and the forces that have made our present world and continue making it every day? How are we to understand this world – and which texts can tell us the most about it or currently have the most to do with shaping it? These are the questions that must be asked at the beginning of our historical inquiry and continue to be heard throughout that inquiry. (p. 158)

When the Common Core’s developers began creating the ELA Standards, however, they did not begin with the present student and what she knows or needs. Haycock (2010) pointed out that the Common Core did not initially focus on what students should know from a discipline’s perspective:

Instead of asking the content experts what students “should” know, which inevitably led to long lists of everything the drafters thought would be desirable to know about their

disciplines, the question became: What did students *need* to know in order to be successful in college? (p. 17)

The Common Core developers began, then, with college and career readiness and worked backwards to build a “staircase” to readiness (Common Core, 2010a, p. 8). As a neoliberal project, the Common Core’s approach mirrors that of the developers of the American Diploma Project. Working backwards from college and career expectations, the American Diploma Project’s developers

first asked leading economists to examine market projections for the most promising jobs — those that pay enough to support a small family and provide real potential for career advancement — and to pinpoint the academic knowledge and skills required for success in those occupations. [They] also worked closely with two- and four-year postsecondary leaders in the partner states to determine the prerequisite English and mathematics knowledge and skills required for success in entry-level, credit-bearing courses in English, mathematics, the sciences, the social sciences and humanities.

(American Diploma Project, 2004, p. 4)

The Common Core ELA Standards, like ADP before it, do not base what students need to know on their being a student of a discipline or an adolescent but on market projections and “postsecondary leaders” (American Diploma Project, p. 4).

As the object of knowledge the Common Core ELA Standards produce, the student subject is not an acting subject who created the Common Core. Although the introduction to the ELA Common Core asserts that students provided input into the ELA Standards’ development (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3), the introduction to the Common Core as a whole does not indicate any student participation outside of 2% of the nearly 10,000 comments given when the Common

Core draft was made available for public comment (Watt, 2011). The Common Core's portrait of the graduating ELA student, then, is not a self-portrait with the student producing herself as the secondary ELA student or even identifying herself as such.

Not only are students not the producers of the ELA Common Core, but they are also not its audience and consequent users. The mechanism for students' improvement is, ironically, not by or for the very people it aims to improve. In the introduction to the Common Core, the Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers state that they "are pleased to present the final Kindergarten – grade 12 Common Core State Standards documents that our organizations have produced on behalf of 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia" (Common Core, 2010e, para. 1). The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers present the standards but do not identify to whom. To determine the Common Core's intended audience, I considered who would use the Common Core. The "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the Common Core website offers perhaps the strongest evidence that teachers are the intended users and audience of the Common Core. In response to a question asking what educational standards are, the Common Core defines standards by saying that "educational standards help teachers ensure that students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning" (Common Core, "Frequently Asked Questions," 2010d). Another indicator of the intended user of the standards can be found in the Common Core's "Key design considerations." A section there entitled "A focus on results rather than on means" states that "by emphasizing required achievements, the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 4). Teachers, along with curriculum makers and states, then, are the

Common Core ELA Standards' users because they determine how students meet the standards. None of the Common Core documents indicate what, if anything, students should do with the ELA Standards. In short, the ELA Standards are for teachers and about future students. Where, then, are the present ELA students?

The Production of the ELA Student as a Docile Body

To determine how the Common Core ELA Standards' produce the ELA student subject as an object of knowledge, I closely read the Common Core ELA Standards' introductory document because the developers used the first several pages of the Common Core ELA Standards to provide the *how* and the *why* of the standards. Given that a Foucaultian genealogical study focuses on the discursive production and control of the body, I examined the student's body by first locating it within the introductory materials that explain and justify the Common Core ELA Standards. The language within the ELA Standards' introduction produces a student subject who is talked about but rarely talks and acts intentionally.

Bové (1990) noted "the way in which discourses constitute ['objects' and 'classes of objects'] as 'true' or 'false' according to the logic, syntax, and semantics of the empowered discourse" (p. 57). In the next section, I show how I analyzed the "logic, syntax, and semantics" of the Common Core ELA Standards' introductory documents to locate the student and determine what kind of student subject the Common Core ELA Standards enable by noting the words the documents emphasize in describing the student. I also analyzed the position of the student within the syntactical structure of the introductory documents' discourse. For the most part, the student in the introduction is passive and spoken about only as a future adult; thus, the student is an object, not a subject, except in the future.

Locating the student.

Although the Common Core’s introductory documents establish the production of students who are “literate individuals” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7) as the marketable outcome of the standards, *student* rarely appears in the documents. The word *student* or *students* appears in the ELA introduction several times, beginning with the first paragraph. Within the opening paragraph, *student* functions only as the subject of a dependent clause in the last sentence:

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (“the Standards”) are the culmination of an extended broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K-12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school. (Common Core, p. 3)

This introductory paragraph establishes that the purpose of the ELA Standards is to produce college and career-ready students. In the students’ first appearance in the Common Core ELA Standards’ documents, however, they do nothing and are described only in terms of their future readiness. This passive production continues throughout the introductory documents via the students’ syntactic position within sentence structures. For example, in the remainder of the introduction, students mostly appear as objects. In the second sentence *students*, along with other “numerous sources” who provided input, is the object of a preposition. *Students* passively appears again in the fifth paragraph as the direct object of the infinitive “to help.” Often when *students* is the subject of a clause, either the clause is dependent or the clause’s verb has a modal helping verb. For example, in the fifth paragraph *students* does appear as the subject of a dependent clause, but the clause’s action verb, *learn*, is paired with the modal verb *must*,

indicating obligatory rather than intentional learning. Therefore, the Common Core’s discourse literally positions students as mostly passive subjects who rarely act from their own intention.

The last paragraph of the introduction makes the case that mastery of the literacy skills “students are expected to demonstrate” within the Common Core will carry over into students’ lives beyond college and work. In this paragraph the word *students* is used for the first time as the subject of an active voice sentence, but the subject and verb are separated by a qualifying clause: “Students *who meet the standards* [emphasis added] readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 3). The paragraph’s next three sentences employ the pronoun *they* in reference to students to further posit what students who master the standards will hypothetically do. Between each use of the subject *they* and the corresponding action verb is an adverb (e.g., *habitually*, *actively*, and *reflexively*) that denotes a disposition, although the Common Core ELA Standards themselves never use dispositional adverbs to describe what students do, nor do they use verbs that directly foster a particular disposition. Finally, *students* appears in the last sentence of the introduction as the subject of an active voice sentence, again separated by the qualifying clause, “who meet the standards.” The sentence summarizes the last paragraph to say that “students who meet the standards” will have the skills “that are the foundation of any creative and purposeful expression in language” (Common Core, p. 3). The Common Core’s sentence structure produces the student in the present as docile if not absent. For example, the word functions as the subject of an active voice sentence less than half the time outside the standards themselves. In the other sentences, students do not act but are acted upon as they function as the object of a preposition, a direct object, or the subject of a linking verb or passive voice sentence.

Other than the grade-level standards, the section in which *students* is most used as the subject of a sentence with an active voice verb is the one entitled “Students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening and language.” This section is the one I pointed to earlier as the Common Core’s “portrait of students who meet the standards set out in this document” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7). Because this section describes students who have mastered the standards, the word *students* is mostly used as the subject of active voice sentences that describe the practices of students who have met the standards. The role of the present ELA student in the ELA Common Core is, then, unclear. For the most part, present students do not act; they are docile bodies who are acted upon for improvement.

Disciplining practices.

I addressed earlier how the Common Core’s introductory materials position the student as a docile body to be disciplined in anticipation of and preparation for the future rather than the producer of his or her own actions and practices. Rabinow (1984) summarized the goal of Foucault’s historical analyses as an effort “to discover the relations of specific scientific disciplines and particular social practices” (p. 5). Foucault (1977/1980b) noted that power “only exists in action” (p. 89). The power within the current discourse of ELA moves mostly within the standards that mandate students’ action. Foucault (1977/1995) noted that power attaches “at the level of the mechanism itself – movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity; an infinitesimal power over the active body” (p. 137). Prado (2000) summarized Foucault’s assertion by saying, “It is the body that bears and manifests the effects of regulating discourses in its habits and gestures, in its postures, in its speech” (p. 36). These practices of the body indicate not just action but also intention. For example, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2011), a gesture is not just a movement but a “movement of the body or limbs as an expression of feeling.” Likewise, a habit

can be an action or way of thinking, “a settled disposition or tendency to act in a certain way, esp. one acquired by frequent repetition of the same act until it becomes almost or quite involuntary; a settled practice, custom, usage” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2011). The Common Core ELA Standards discipline students by mandating the student body’s action and practices.

The portrayal of students as mostly docile in the Common Core’s introductory documents continues in the Common Core anchor and grade-specific ELA Standards, particularly in terms of student intention. When students do act within the notes accompanying the anchor standards, they more often than not act out of compulsion. For example, over half the time when *students* is the subject of an action verb, the verb is preceded by a modal verb such as *must*, *should*, *can*, or *may*, indicating that students are not acting of their own intention but out of obligation to meet the goals of the standards. Modal verbs are used most often in the notes accompanying each set of anchor standards. In fact, when *students* appears in the anchor standards as the subject of a clause, it is most often paired with the modal verbs *must* or *should*. In the reading anchor standards alone, including the introductory paragraph and the note, *students* is the subject of four sentences, three of which use the modal verbs *should* or *must*. Unlike the introductory documents, however, all the anchor standards and the grade-specific standards use *students* as a subject of an active voice sentence. Each anchor standard and grade-specific standard begins with an action verb with the understood subject *students*. Although the grade-specific standards have as their heading the word *students* qualified with the related grade-level (e.g., Grades 9-10 students...), the word *students* is not repeated in each standard sentence. Students are present and acting in the standards, then, but only under obligation or as an understood subject.

To determine what the Common Core names as the core practices of an ELA student, I explored the ELA Standards’ language within the context of their truth claims that enable the

Common Core's discourse and its production of ELA and the ELA student. Because the Common Core asserts reading and writing as the primary literacy skills, I examined how the Common Core produces students as readers and writers. I looked at when students are asked to act as I considered the implications of the second truth claim that ELA has a core of knowledge that is best presented sequentially in age-specific order. Finally, I noted how what students are required to do reflects and does not reflect the capacities of the literate individual.

Reading students.

The Common Core disciplines students to approach reading within a positivist framework. That is, the Common Core produces student readers who seek meaning in a text and rely on that text to provide evidence for any assertions they make. Reading, the first content strand in the ELA Common Core, consists of ten anchor standards, ten grade-specific standards for the reading of literature, and ten grade-specific standards for the reading of informational texts. Based on the language the Common Core uses to describe what students should do when they read, its discourse produces students for whom reading is an impersonal act. The Common Core's goal for students' reading reflects Ryan's (2006) positivist description of knowledge as "being something discovered, not produced by human beings" (p. 15). Students read not to make meaning but, first, to find meaning by analyzing a text and, second, to find evidence to back any claims they make about the meaning they find. In the Common Core, the texts students read from grade to grade must be increasingly complex. According to Coleman (2011b), within the Common Core "the real distinction in the growth of reading is of course the level of complexity of the text that you're managing" (p. 3). The Common Core provides an explanation of how to determine text complexity that includes not only qualitative and quantitative measures but also "reader and task considerations" (Common Core, 2010a, Appendix A, p. 4). While the

“considerations” concern readers’ “motivation, knowledge, and experiences,” the student does not make the decision of what text to read. The teacher decides: “Such assessments are best made by teachers employing their professional judgment, experience, and knowledge of their students and the subject” (Common Core, p. 4).

ELA students who read like detectives.

Embracing the positivist approach to knowledge as “objective, empirical and scientific” (Ryan, 2006, p. 15), the Common Core produces student subjects for whom reading is analysis. The Common Core ELA Standards most often use the words *analyze* and *use* to describe core ELA practices. Analysis is the only practice prescribed at least once in each of the four content strands in either the anchor or grade-level standards, although it is most prevalent in the reading standards. The only other verbs used more than once in the anchor standards to name what counts as ELA practices are *read* and *determine*. In the grades 9-10 reading literature standards, over half the standards begin with *analyze*⁹. One corresponding standard in the grades 11-12 standards substitutes *demonstrate knowledge* for *analyze*, an interesting move to what Bloom (1956) would define as a lower thinking level. Ironically, *analyze*, despite being the most-used verb in the reading standards, never appears in the section that describes itself as the portrait of the student who has mastered the standards. In other words, the ability to analyze texts is not one of the capacities the Common Core attributes to literate individuals but is the most emphasized skill within the standards.

Just as the Common Core excludes *literacy* from its “Glossary of key terms” in Appendix A, the Common Core also does not include *analyze*, so the writers must have assumed the term’s

⁹ Although the reading anchor standards consist of 10 standards, only 9 of the anchor standards relate to and, thus, are the purview of reading literature grade-specific standards.

meaning to be commonsense. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2010) defines *analyze* as “to examine (a text) critically to bring out its meaning; to discuss the style, structure, or composition of (a literary work).” In the reading grade-specific standards, the analysis expected from students denotes this meaning. For example, one reading anchor standard states that students must “analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme” (Common Core, 2010a, RL. 9-10.3, p. 38). In this case the student focuses on the development of characters, one part of the overall text. Likewise, RL.11-12.6 (p. 38) requires students to “analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement)” (Common Core, p. 38). Each of the standards requires students to focus on one part of the text. The goal of reading, then, is for the student to take apart a text piece by piece in search of meaning.

Regardless of the standard or the verb a standard begins with, what all the reading standards have in common is that students focus on the text and approach it as would a detective (Coleman, 2011b). In fact, valuing evidence is one of the capacities the Common Core attributes to being a literate individual. The student’s role as textual detective is evident in each ELA content strand because each strand requires students to support a textual claim with textual evidence. For example, the first reading anchor standard, which is the first ELA standard within the Common Core, asks students to “read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (Common Core, 2010a, R.CCR.1, p. 35). As the first standard, this standard establishes the primacy of evidence and argument, not just for

informational texts but for literature as well. That is to say, what students learn to do with a piece of literature first is to find evidence within the text to support any assertion they make about it.

This skill is emphasized again in the next standard, which requires students to provide supporting details for what they posit is the main idea. The third standard requires students to “analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text” (Common Core, R.CCR.3, p. 35). Students, then, not only analyze what happens in a text but also determine why it happens. According to these reading standards, evidence must come only from the text and not from the student’s experience or ideas:

Whatever they are reading, students must also show a steadily growing ability to discern more from and make fuller use of text, including making an increasing number of connections among ideas and between texts, considering a wider range of textual evidence, and becoming more sensitive to inconsistencies, ambiguities, and poor reasoning in texts. (Common Core, p. 8)

Reflecting Ryan’s (2006) assertion that within positivism “the relationship between the self and knowledge has been largely denied” (p. 15), the Common Core’s focus on analysis and evidence in reading ignores altogether the student and any relationship between the student and the text.

The Common Core establishes that the point of students’ reading is not to explicate personal connections to the text or make meaning of the text but to find meaning and connections within and among texts. In short, the text is the means and the end. Nowhere was the Common Core’s devotion to the primacy of the text more bluntly stated than in an April 2011 presentation at the New York State Department of Education. The presentation called “Bringing the Common Core to life” was given by one of the Common Core’s architects, David Coleman, who said, “The text is the master class here. I as the teacher and student am the servant of it and I have a

certain reverence for it” (Coleman, 2011a, p. 8). In his presentation, Coleman introduced the Common Core ELA standards by explaining how they represent a shift from past standards efforts. Coleman then demonstrated how to teach a text in a way that supports the standards. In his presentation Coleman dismissed pre-reading strategies designed to engage readers or encourage students to make connections to what they read. He posited that providing contextual information, making predictions, and setting a purpose for reading other than just reading are pointless and distract students from the author’s purpose. Coleman (2011a) instead promoted solely “text-dependent questions” and dismissed a text’s historical context. Coleman placed value only on the primacy of the text and authorial purpose. This primacy was evident during Coleman’s demonstration of his own sample lesson on Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963). In that sample lesson, students function only as readers and responders to teachers’ questions because “the first and most important [technique] is to let the mysteries that the letter provokes be the source of student motivation and your interest rather than anything you or I presume about you or your history” (Coleman, p. 7). Coleman’s emphasis on the text and the dismissal of the student’s history and connections to a text perpetuates the student as a docile body. Students are secondary to the text. They are not asked to go beyond the text to make personal connections or ask questions until after they have read and responded to text-based questions.

Old tools for new jobs.

The Common Core ELA Standards consist of two distinct categories of reading within the reading standards, “Reading standards for literature 6-12” and “Reading standards for informational text 6-12.” This deliberate emphasis on informational text is a shift from previous

standards such as the GPS, where the reading of nonfiction¹⁰ is included in some reading standards but is not a separate category from the reading of literature. In the Common Core's "Key design consideration" section, the emphasis on informational text is based on the assertion that "most of the required reading in college and workforce training programs is informational in structure and challenging in content" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 4). The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers also cite the 2009 National Association of Educational Progress's reading framework that advocates that 12th graders' reading should be comprised of thirty percent literary and seventy percent informational texts (Common Core, p. 5). The responsibility for assigning students informational texts to read is shared by content area teachers as well as ELA teachers whose primary informational text should be literary nonfiction. According to the "Note on range and content of student reading" that accompanies the reading anchor standards, students who read increasingly difficult literary and non-literary texts "gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images; the ability to evaluate intricate arguments; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts" (Common Core, p. 35).

The neoconservative emphasis on traditional knowledge is reflected in what counts as reading in the Common Core. For example, neoconservatism promotes "a 'return' to higher standards and a 'common culture'" (Apple, 2004, p. 15). Reflecting this promotion of a common

¹⁰ The Common Core uses the term *nonfiction* only when talking about literary nonfiction. In the explanation for what range of texts is appropriate for grades 6-12, the Common Core states that literary nonfiction "includes the subgenres of exposition, argument, and functional text in the form of personal essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts (including digital sources) written for a broad audience" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 57).

culture, the only literary nonfictional texts the secondary Common Core ELA Standards mandate are “The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 40). Likewise, the Common Core ELA standards mandate the reading of only one author by name, Shakespeare. The note accompanying the reading anchor standards also mentions only Shakespeare when it states that “texts should be chosen from among seminal U.S. documents, the classics of American literature, and the timeless dramas of Shakespeare” (Common Core, p. 35). In grades 9-10, a standard gives Shakespeare’s work as an example of how an author “draws on and transforms source material in a specific work” like the Bible or Ovid’s work (Common Core, RL.9.9-10, p. 47). Teachers are required to include works of Shakespeare within two standards in the grades 11-12 standards. The first time Shakespeare is mandated is in a standard where students analyze authors’ word choice, “including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)” (Common Core, RL.4.11-12, p. 38). The second time Shakespeare is mandated is in a standard in which students evaluate how different versions of a literary work interpret the original, and the teacher is directed to “include at least one play by Shakespeare” (Common Core, RL.7.11-12, p. 38). The Common Core as preparation for 21st century college and career success singles out Shakespeare from all other authors, past or present, for students to read.

The Common Core offers no explanation of why Shakespeare is the sole author the ELA Standards mandate. His inclusion in the curriculum of U.S. ELA classrooms is certainly not new but reflects the traditional curriculum of the last century. The prevalence of Shakespeare’s work in today’s schools and in the Common Core represents the power the old required reading lists, with their hegemony of British literature, have exerted over public schools and ELA curricula.

For example, Applebee (1993) found that Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* was the book-length work most read by high school sophomores and was required in 70% of public schools, even though 84% of them had probably already read *Romeo and Juliet*, another Shakespearean play. Ironically, Shakespeare was not always considered a must-read classic. In fact, teachers were punished for reading Shakespeare in English courses in the mid-nineteenth century.

Shakespeare's work, particularly *Julius Caesar*, entered the American English curriculum not because it was recognized as an instant classic but because it was one of the first complete texts to be annotated. When schools and colleges began to focus more on "the study of complete texts required in the college lists, publishers began to bring out annotated editions of popular works" (Applebee, 1974, p. 34). William Rolfe "launched his career as editor and author with his American version of Craik's edition of [*Julius Caesar*]" (Applebee, p. 34) complete with contextual annotations such as an introduction and a history of the play. Shakespeare's play entered the American school curriculum not because of its intrinsic literary superiority but because it was one of the first annotated full texts.

In addition to the few required texts named within the Common Core ELA Standards themselves, the Common Core offers two lists of sample texts. The first is entitled "Texts illustrating the complexity, quality, and range of student reading 6-12" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 58). A note at the bottom of the list states that the texts are "meant only to show individual titles that are representative of a range of topics and genres." This list includes titles from a larger list of text exemplars that "primarily serve to exemplify the level of complexity and quality that the Standards require all students in a given grade band to engage with" (Common Core, 2010c, p. 2). The Common Core considers a text difficult if it "rel[ies] on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic or otherwise unfamiliar language or on general academic and

domain-specific vocabulary” (Common Core, 2010b, p. 5). Because the Common Core counts archaic and ambiguous texts as more difficult and worth reading, the Common Core produces students who perpetuate the neoconservative idea that older texts are more difficult and, therefore, superior.

According to the Common Core, the selections within the lists are “guideposts” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 58), not a mandated list of readings. Even if students are not required to read these particular texts, though, they are likely to read texts like them, which means, as I noted earlier, that students will be reading mostly old texts. The Common Core ELA Standards’ writers used several criteria to select the texts in the list of exemplars. The first two criteria were complexity and quality. Once a text was deemed sufficiently complex and of high enough quality, the “work group” considered “initial publication date, authorship, and subject matter” (Common Core, 2010c, p. 2). I focused on these three factors as I considered the implication of the sample texts and similar texts for students’ preparation for 21st century literacy and success.

Noting modern deference to the past, Foucault (1977) posited that “lacking monuments of our own making, which properly belong to us, we live among crowded scenes” (p. 159). The texts the Common Core offers as exemplars reflect the “crowded scene” in which students will find themselves, a scene crowded not by contemporary works but by works from the past. The list of text exemplars includes a list for grades 9-10 and one for 11-CCR, with examples of literature divided into stories, drama, and poetry and informational texts for three subject areas – ELA; history/social studies; and science, mathematics, and technical subjects. I focused primarily on the ELA texts but also mention the other subjects as points of comparison. Each grade-level genre contains anywhere from six (Grades 9-10 drama) exemplars to 19 (Grade 11-CCR stories). Two-thirds of the content categories contain texts published in the 21st century.

Although a story published in 2005 is included as an exemplar for grades 9-10, the median date of publication for the 16 grades 9-10 stories is actually 1955. The median publication dates for drama and poetry are 1911 and 1896, respectively. Similarly, the most recent publication date for grades 9-10 is 1977. These publication dates for the grades 9-10 texts are significant because students who read only texts that follow the example of this list will read no drama or poetry and very few stories that were published in their lifetimes. In fact, the most recent drama texts in 9-10 and 11-CCR were published in 1982 and 1976, respectively.

Literature in grades 11-CCR follows a similar pattern. The median publication date for the 19 exemplary stories is 1887; for drama, 1938; and for poetry, 1917. Exemplary informational texts are more contemporary, particularly in content areas other than ELA. For example, the median publication date for the grades 9-10 texts is 1950, but history/social studies' median publication date is 1998. In grades 11-CCR the difference in the median of publication dates between ELA and history/social studies is 85 years with ELA's being 1909 and history/social studies' being 1994. Another interesting fact is that the range of publication dates for the grades 9-10 ELA informational texts is 368 years, but the range for grades 9-10 history/social studies texts is only 39 years. In other words, the informational texts about history cover a much smaller amount of time than texts about ELA. Not only do history's informational texts represent a shorter span of time, but that time is generally much more recent. Whereas over half the informational texts for history/social studies were published after 1995, only one ELA informational text was. Ironically, the Common Core contains more historic pieces in the study of students' current language than in the actual study of history.

The exemplars' authors represent some variety of backgrounds and culture but do not represent the cultural diversity of the world in which students live and will live in 21st century.

The demographics of the Common Core's text exemplar list's authors is similar to the traditional demographics of authors in ELA curricula. For example, Applebee (1993) found that in 1963, 85% of authors of book-length works read in public schools were male, and 100% of them were White. In 1988, the percentage of male authors read in schools dropped only 2% as did the number of White authors.

Authorship was a criterion for the Common Core's text exemplar selection process, so the representation is a deliberate one. Of the 37 authors of texts chosen from the exemplar texts to represent "a range of topics and genres" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 58), 76 percent are male. Seventy-three percent of the authors are White, nineteen percent are Black, three percent are Hispanic, and five percent are Asian. These proportions do not correlate with the shifts predicted for the United States' population for the 21st century. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2050, less than 53 percent of the U.S. population will be non-Hispanic Whites, with 23 percent being Hispanic, 16 percent being Black, 10 percent being Asian or Pacific Islander, and one percent being American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut (Day, 2010).

Given how and the frequency with which culture is addressed throughout the ELA Common Core, a clear correlation is difficult to make between students' experiences with literature from diverse cultures and a consequent capacity to "understand other perspectives and cultures" (Common Core, 2010a, p. 7). Although the ELA speaking and listening standards do require students to "prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners" (Common Core, SL.CCR.1, p. 48), it would be difficult to make the case that those conversations alone would lead students to "appreciate that the twenty-first-century classroom and workplace are settings in which people from often widely diverse experiences and perspectives must learn and work together" (Common Core, p. 7). There is no

way to ensure that any experience students have in school will lead to their appreciation of it, particularly since so few of the sample texts reflect the diversity of the 21st century.

In sum, the Common Core ELA Standards discursively produce students as reading subjects mostly in terms of their positivist ability to analyze texts. Within a positivist paradigm texts are worth reading only if they are difficult and, based on the list of text exemplars, old. Although the Common Core purports to prepare students with the literacy necessary for readiness for college and career readiness, the sample exemplars represent a range of dates and authors reflective more of past centuries than the present one. Likewise, as I demonstrate in the next section, the Common Core defines students as writers in terms of their ability to compose an argument supported by textual evidence and not in terms of students' relation to the text.

Writing students.

Along with reading, the Common Core ELA Standards name writing as one of the primary 21st century literacy skills necessary for college and career readiness. The Common Core produces students for whom writing is more a means of argument than personal expression because, as Ryan (2006) wrote, within a positivist paradigm “only certain topics are worthy of enquiry, namely those that exist in the public world” (p. 15). The Common Core includes writing as a significant content component and mandates that students learn to write three genres – argument, informative/explanatory, and narrative. These categories describing writing purposes are similar to state standards' such as the Georgia Performance Standards' purposes for student writing, although the Common Core uses different language to name those purposes. For example, the Common Core refers to persuasive writing as argument and to expository as informative/explanatory. In addition to a difference in language, the Common Core makes a shift in terms of when students write for various purposes. Whereas the Georgia Performance

Standards assigned one type of writing to each grade level, the Common Core mandates each type of writing for each grade-level pairing. In other words, students write to argue, explain, and narrate every year.

Whereas other standards documents such as the Georgia Performance Standards mandate that students learn the writing process, the Common Core requires only that students attend to task, purpose, and audience; word choice and structure; and development, style and organization. Most importantly, regardless of what process students use to complete a piece of writing, they must be able to assert and defend claims (argue), show what they know about a subject (explain), and convey what they have experienced, imagined, thought and felt (narrate) in various ways.

Earlier I posited that according to the Common Core ELA standards what counts as reading for ELA students is analysis. Similarly, what counts as writing for ELA students is argument. In fact, in describing the purpose for writing arguments in different disciplines, the Common Core states what counts as writing arguments in ELA: “In English language arts, students make claims about the worth or meaning of a literary work or works. They defend their interpretations or judgments with evidence from the text(s) they are writing about” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 23). Although the Common Core mandates three purposes for students’ writing, the note introducing the writing anchor standards reveals the hierarchy of writing purposes: “For students, writing is a key means of asserting and defending claims, showing what they know about a subject, and conveying what they have experienced, imagined, thought, and felt” (Common Core, p. 41). Writing to defend a claim is also the writing purpose that the Common Core links to preparation for college and career readiness. Like reading’s emphasis on making claims and supporting those claims with evidence, the Common Core holds “a special place” for argument and emphasizes “writing logical arguments as a particularly important form of college-

and career-ready writing” (Common Core, 2010b, p. 24). According to the Common Core, an argument relies on “the perceived merit and reasonableness of the claims and proofs offered rather than either the emotions the writing evokes in the audience of the character or credentials of the writer” (Common Core, p. 24). In short, the focus is more on ensuring that students can make a case for an argument through the articulation and use of text-based evidence rather than through an emotional appeal.

Students are required to write narratives in the secondary ELA Common Core to “convey experience” (Common Core, 2010b, p. 23). The standards also promote the use of narrative as a rhetorical device. For example, the note accompanying the writing anchor standards states that “[students] need to know how to combine elements of different kinds of writing – for example, to use narrative strategies within argument and explanation within narrative – to produce complex and nuanced writing” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 41). According to Coleman (2011b), however, “[the standards] do support training in narrative throughout K-12 but what they make primary as you grow is the ability to write an argument based on evidence and convey complex information. This is an essential shift” (p. 4). Although the Common Core promotes narrative writing, one can only wonder about the place it will take in classrooms with the focus on argument and evidence. Pointing out that narrative or personal writing is currently the most popular form of writing in high schools, Coleman (2011b) said, “The only problem, forgive me for saying this so bluntly, the only problem with those two forms of writing is as you grow up in this world you realize people really don’t give a sheet¹¹ about what you feel or what you think” (p. 3). The notion that “people don’t really give a sheet about what [students] feel or what

¹¹ Although the transcript of Coleman’s presentation uses the word *sheet*, Coleman used the word *shit* in his presentation.

[students] think” is reflected in many of the ways the Common Core describes what ELA students do, particularly as readers and writers. Perhaps Coleman’s sentiment is why the use of creative writing forms such as poetry is left to the discretion of the teacher (Common Core, 2010b, p. 23). Coleman (2011b) said of the Common Core reading and writing standards, “Sometimes I sum up the standards by saying they require you to read like a detective and write like an investigative reporter. More and more I feel like I should say, ‘Read like a detective and write like a conscientious investigative reporter’” (p. 4). If reading and writing as defined within the Common Core are the 21st literacy skills students need for success in college and career, students who master the Common Core will be adept at making claims and providing evidence for those claims, but they will likely not be to express what they think or to value what they think when they read or write.

Who then is the ELA student subject produced by the Common Core ELA Standards? Reflecting the hegemonic influence of positivism and neoconservatism, what practices count as ELA has grown narrower and more traditional than innovative and revolutionary. The student subject described in the Common Core ELA Standards is not an acting subject but a passive production who is assumed to have core capacities that the school subject ELA enables. Foucault (1977/1995) wrote that “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body” (p. 26). An underlying premise of the Common Core ELA Standards is that upon graduation ELA students are useful if they are competitive in the global economy. As a neoliberal project, the Common Core ELA Standards position the ELA student body as a passive, docile one, a problem to be solved, and discursively produce the student subject for the purpose of market competition. Whether or not the Common Core’s student subject will be marketable is yet to be seen. Despite being groomed for future success in entry-level college

courses and jobs in the 21st century, the Common Core ELA student subject approaches reading and writing in much the same way as an ELA student in the 1950s might have. As readers and writers, the ELA student subject will be recognizable and familiar to former ELA students. Like his or her parents, the ELA student reads mostly old texts and searches diligently for the meaning that is assumed to be within them. Rather than read for pleasure or make personal connections with a text, the student reads to uncover the meaning that lies hidden in the text. Similarly, the student writes and, likewise, stays close to the text in order to mine it for ammunition to use in an argument. In a time of innovation and countless possibilities for students' future lives, the Common Core ELA Standards produce a student who is constructed not as the producer but as the consumer, not as the participant but as the reporter, not as the creator but as the created.

Summary

Foucaultian genealogy as an historic analytic begins in the present. For this study of secondary ELA, the present is the Common Core ELA Standards. The purpose of this chapter was to explore how the Common Core ELA Standards describe ELA and the ELA student they enable. To achieve this purpose I analyzed how the Common Core functions as a discourse that produces two objects of knowledge – the subject ELA as a discipline and the human subject, the ELA student. Heeding the words of Bové (1990) as he described poststructural analysis of discourse, I closely analyzed the language and syntax of the standards to explore how they produce secondary ELA and ELA students as objects of knowledge. The standards' documents' language reflects an assumption of two self-evident truths about ELA. One is that the sole purpose of ELA is to prepare students with literacy to ensure their readiness for college and career within the 21st century. The other is that ELA has a core knowledge that is best articulated in an age-specific sequence. While the Common Core ELA Standards and their supplementary

documents assert these truths, the ELA Standards often contradict them, particularly in how the standards discipline students who are represented mostly as docile bodies. Although the Common Core advocates 21st century literacy via reading and writing skills, the reading and writing in which students are required to engage reflects a clinging to the past and a disregard for expression that is not text-based. Students engage in fundamental skill and knowledge acquisition presented in an often random sequence that is tied to grade levels and not students' needs or prior knowledge. The practices and knowledge the Common Core ELA Standards prescribe produce a docile student subject who passively achieves what the ELA Standards counts as college and career readiness.

CHAPTER 5

ANSWERS AND MORE QUESTIONS FOR MADISON

Dear Madison,

Several years ago you were a student in my 9th grade ELA class, and if I remember correctly, you were repeating the course but were in my class for the first time. I want you to know that a question you asked when you were in my class has had a profound impact on me as an educator. In the middle of working on an assignment one ordinary day, you asked, “If I already know how to read and write, why do I need to take three more years of high school English?” Your question showed that you knew that reading and writing are important skills to learn. That is, you understood the value of traditional literacy – the ability to read and write – and the school’s role to teach students to read and write. Based on your previous experiences in school, though, you anticipated that the remainder of your high school ELA classes would simply be a repetition of literacy learning and offer nothing new in terms of relevancy to your life or your future. You offered a unique perspective because, even as a high school freshman, you already had a job and future job security with your family’s successful business, which meant that your ultimate education goal was not finding employment. I often wonder how you think about and use writing and reading now in your life and in your work.

Although you may not remember asking the question, I obviously remember it vividly, and, to be honest, it bothered me. What disturbed me most was that I could see your point, which was unnerving to me as a veteran secondary ELA teacher. Your question tapped into my own uneasiness with how ELA is defined by educators and policymakers. In the years before you

asked me the question, I had begun to find ELA's content increasingly irrelevant to students' interests and lives because much of what my students read was what I had read as a secondary ELA student and much of what we studied was repetitive. What drove ELA teaching in the schools where I taught was always what came next – the next grade, college, or future career goals – rather than the student in the classroom, and what we taught was based largely on what we had been taught, what texts were available to us, and what the teachers in the grade beyond ours expected her students to know. In the years after I taught you, I spent time observing in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms, and although I saw some innovative teaching and dynamic learning, I also saw the repetition that you must have experienced. Students in almost every grade level (re)learned the same grammatical concepts, especially the parts of speech. Students read different materials but often talked about texts in terms of what they found, e.g., metaphors, similes, and symbols. My own daughter was required to read a Shakespearean play in middle school so she would be prepared to read it in high school. Considering what frustrated me as a teacher and what I have observed, I became an educator asking the same question you did.

When the Common Core State Standards were introduced two years ago, I wondered how they might describe secondary ELA differently. Whenever a new reform effort is implemented, teachers grumble that it's just another reform that they'll have to endure until the next one comes along. And the next one does always come along eventually. The Common Core felt different, though, because it happened so quickly and it was national, meaning that, even though the federal government didn't sponsor the Common Core State Standards, almost every state agreed to adopt them. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2011) referred to their development and acceptance as a "quiet revolution." Because the Common Core was touted as revolutionary

and was so widely and readily accepted, I couldn't help but think of you and wonder if it would have been possible for you to ask me why you needed three more years of high school English had you been in my classroom under the guidance of the Common Core State Standards. I also thought about future ELA students: Will students who take secondary ELA classes guided by the Common Core be less likely to ask a question about the value of the collective secondary ELA experience? Will they have the same questions about the purpose of secondary ELA in terms of their own literacy growth? Would the Common Core foster a less repetitive curriculum for secondary ELA?

Shortly after you were in my class, I left secondary teaching to pursue my doctorate in language and literacy education, and these questions became the catalyst for my dissertation research, especially after the sudden development and almost unanimous national acceptance of the Common Core. Through this research I wanted to explore how the Common Core State ELA Standards became possible and how they describe secondary ELA and the ELA student. For my dissertation research I used the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault to help me think. More specifically, I used his genealogy. As you probably know, a genealogy usually seeks the beginning of something and then traces the line of ascent from the beginning to the present. Foucaultian genealogy is also a historical analytic but it begins with a problem in the present and does not look for an origin but traces lines of descent to multiple beginnings. In other words, whereas a traditional genealogy takes the forms of a line, a Foucaultian genealogy looks more like a web. My reason for using Foucaultian genealogy wasn't to find the beginning of the Common Core or ELA or ELA students but to think about the conditions that made the Common Core thinkable. Foucault's work also helped me address not what the Common Core ELA Standards are but what they do. Mahon (1992) wrote that Foucault's genealogy takes on

Nietzsche and Foucault's philosophical mission "of diagnosing the present, 'to say what we are today, what it means to say what we say'" (p. 121). In the case of the Common Core, Foucaultian genealogy disrupted the assumption that the Common Core ELA Standards were the next natural description of ELA and the ELA student and asked what it means for the Common Core to describe ELA and the ELA student in the way that it does.

What I found during my research was that the Common Core Standards are not the next natural step in a neat linear progression of events. They just are. They exist because a particular network of events – large, small, and adjacent – made them possible. Cracks exist where other possibilities could have emerged. For example, one of George W. Bush administration's justifications for the No Child Left Behind Act was to "ensure equity," which has been the primary role of the federal government in education (Cross, 2004, p. 144). In other words, the legislation sought to erase the achievement gap among different demographic groups. The Obama administration continued along No Child Left Behind's same path of standards-based reform by providing incentives for states to adopt common standards. Many other approaches could have been taken to better ensure the noble goal of equity. For example, the administration could have revisited the idea of opportunity-to-learn standards such as the ones the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association proposed in their 1996 standards effort. Rather than attempting to standardize the product, the government could have, in addition to other options, worked to make the learning environment more equitable.

Working to ensure that all students have the opportunity to have successful futures is certainly a worthy goal. Although the Common Core ELA Standards name their goal acquiring literacy for college and career readiness for the 21st century, though, you might be also disappointed to learn, Madison, that the Common Core offers little that is new or revolutionary

as it “articulate[s] the fundamentals” (Common Core, 2010a, p. 6). Trying to describe ELA’s basics, its core, the Common Core ELA Standards produce an ELA student, someone like you, for whom reading is the detailed, textual analysis of progressively difficult informational texts or non-fiction texts like you read in your social studies classes. Writing as well as speaking is mainly constructing arguments.

Speaking about the core skills of reading and writing, David Coleman (2011b), one of the Common Core ELA Standards’ lead writers, made the Common Core’s developers’ only mention of specific careers when he said that Common Core ELA Standards “require you to read like a detective and write like an investigative reporter” (p. 4). In other words, Madison, the Common Core would prepare you for a career in journalism or forensics. The text is the Common Core’s reading and writing focus as students must find the meaning of texts and use what they find in the texts as evidence to support any argument they make. The Common Core ELA Standards distance students from reading and writing by producing students who do not make meaning, write creatively or about personal experience, or make personal connections to texts. The relationship between students and the texts they read and write, then, is mostly one of consumption and reproduction. The Common Core’s list of exemplary texts creates even greater historical and literal distance between students and their own reading and writing. Despite the Common Core ELA Standards’ purpose to prepare students for the 21st century, most of the texts listed are old, decades if not centuries old, and written by authors who do not represent the diversity of the United States in the 21st century. In fact, the only author the Common Core requires students to read is Shakespeare. Isn’t that ironic? Who would describe Shakespeare’s writing as journalism?

What counts as ELA remains the same as it was in the 20th century, although the responsibility for teaching students to read and write now falls on other content area teachers as well as English teachers. Given that dispersal of responsibility, the significant increase of informational texts required in ELA classes, and the particular focus on historical U.S. documents, one could wonder what the role of ELA will be in the future. If the teaching of basic reading and writing is the purview of elementary and middle grades and a variety of content areas teach content-based literacy to secondary students, the role of ELA in high schools is no clearer now than it was when you were in school, Madison. The more the ELA tightens, the more nebulous its role in schools becomes.

Although the Common Core has the seemingly straight-forward appeal of linking the standards to what colleges and the work place, even to the point of almost guaranteeing success at either upon mastering the standards, the link between the standards and work is not as straight-forward as it may seem. Given the steady advance of technology, we do not know what jobs students in the 21st century will have. Rather than open up what ELA could be and do, the Common Core creates a tightened version of the 20th century subject. It's almost as if we thought we needed a population that was differently prepared for jobs that don't even exist, but then we flinched because a different-looking ELA subject was too strange.

You may wonder how this tight description of ELA became possible. Historically, although the federal government may have provided funding and the states may have spearheaded efforts, those who have named what counts as ELA have been teaching and content experts, educators at all levels, and members of professional education organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association. Recently, however, an effect of a concept known as neoliberalism, which emphasizes the importance of the

marketplace, has become apparent as business leaders and corporations have entered the conversation by means of funding as well as participation. Because economic and political influences converged in the early 1980s at a time when schools were being blamed for all the United States' woes, people and corporations whose experience in education has been limited have gained entrée into the conversation about what counts as ELA. For example, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funds many of the private organizations driving the Common Core's development. Perhaps the most immediate and relevant condition enabling the Common Core's quick and widespread acceptance was the impression of consensus, the impression that there was agreement about that the Common Core's description of ELA and the ELA student is an appropriate one. These claims of consensus were false because the very organizations who have led past standards efforts did not provide statements of support for the Common Core ELA Standards. For example, although National Council of Teachers of English provided feedback on drafts of the ELA standards, the organization did not endorse them.

Telling you what the Common Core ELA Standards say would offer you nothing surprising, nothing new, but theorizing how those standards function to actually produce students demonstrates their power not just to describe a school subject but to produce a human subject. You described yourself as someone who knew how to read and write, but I wonder if you would also describe yourself, either then or now, as a reader and a writer. In other words, I wonder if the discourse of ELA that produced you as an ELA student produced a reader and a writer. How ELA is described and what practices and knowledge count as ELA produce us as ELA students, and we then continue to produce ourselves as former ELA students by repeating that performance and expecting the same of others. What is naturally assumed as true is powerful, Madison. Because most Americans have been ELA students, we base what we think ELA is on

our experiences. What ELA is, then, becomes a matter of common sense. That those “charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault, 1977/1980a, p. 131) of ELA were not necessarily ELA experts but former ELA students demonstrates that what counts as ELA is seen as commonsense. Is the production of the neoliberal subject whose primary reason for learning is market readiness enough? Is this the student subject we desire as a nation? Would knowing that ELA has this economic end provide a satisfying answer to your question?

Some people find Foucault’s work frustrating because he critiqued but offered no solutions, or as Hoy (1986) wrote, Foucault did not offer “a prescription or a prognosis for the social illness he diagnoses” (p. 7). What his work, particularly his genealogy does do, though, is it “permits social change to be at least complicated” (Hoy, p. 7). The implications of this study are messy and complicated, Madison, especially considering the implications for the role of ELA and literacy in American schools. Although the National Governors Association presented the Common Core standards as the next generation of standards and the states so readily adopted them, I realized through my genealogical work that the Common Core is not the next natural step in a progression toward the 21st century and they are certainly not the end point of standards-based reform.

As a teacher, students like you, Madison, have guided my thinking and my research. Experiences with students have produced who I am as a teacher and influenced how I think about my own teaching and about education in general. As I have completed this research project, another former student has also been prominent in my thoughts. I taught Melanie in another 9th grade English class a few years before I taught you. At the end of the year, the class and I were talking about our year together and looking ahead to the year to come. Melanie said she had a good year, learned a lot, and hoped that the next year she would too because she didn’t want to

waste her time. Little did we know that in just over a year Melody would run out of time. When Melody died in a car wreck a few days before her junior year began, her wish to not waste time weighed heavy in my mind and has influenced how I approach teaching. Because we do spend so much time with our students, I want to make sure that time spent in my class is time well spent. Having spent so much time analyzing the Common Core Standards and considering the ELA student subject they produce, I cannot say that students who are taught using those standards will necessarily feel their time in secondary ELA class was well spent, but I am truly interested in what makes us feel that our time has been well spent in schools.

What my study demonstrates is that standards project such as the Common Core State Standards are not the commonsense, end-of-the-story reforms. They are not all that is possible but are only what happened to emerge given the historical, social, and political conditions in which they were conceived. Too often, reform, rather than following the humanist ideal of linear progress, follows a pattern of crisis and then a return to basics, what some consider the core of a discipline. The idea seems to be that if we could just name the foundational skills of ELA clearly and succinctly enough then student achievement would rise, and all students could go to college or begin successful careers. Actual reform will involve something other than trying to more specifically and clearly name imagining basics we've forgotten. Standards—based reform has become more about standards than students, which is evident in the small number of times students are mentioned actively in the Common Core ELA Standards and their supporting documents. If naming more succinct, clearer standards so greatly improves education, why do we still need to produce new sets of standards time and again?

My questions now are the following: How can educators rethink the purpose of ELA beyond future economic purposes? What would standards that acknowledge that they produce

the present student subject look like? While the question for students may remain the same as they wonder about the relevancy of ELA to their lived lives, the question for educators, policy makers, and U.S. citizens, then, becomes, is the student subject the kind of person we desire as students and citizens? Do we teach students to read Shakespeare, great novels, and important historical documents so that when they grow up, maybe they'll pick up a good book and read it like a detective? Do we teach students to write not so they'll create beautiful poetry or novels or use their writing to think so they'll write like reporters? Is the chief goal of secondary ELA to produce good, competent, competitive workers who can read and write in a certain way?

Foucault (1977) wrote, "truth is undoubtedly the sort of error that cannot be refuted because it was hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history" (p. 144). What has been baked cannot be unbaked. It can only be used for a different purpose or the baker must begin anew. The challenge, then, for those who believe ELA can produce students who not only read and write but see themselves as readers and writers and who see literacy as more than a means to an economic end, is to begin anew and recognize descriptions of secondary ELA are productive and not merely prescriptive.

After completing my research, I believe that if you were going to be a high school freshman next year and asked me the same question, Madison, you wouldn't be any more convinced about the value of the collective experience of high school English than you were then. When our ELA students ask why they need four years of secondary ELA, we must look at the student being produced in front of us in addition to imagining who she might become. Our work in ELA classrooms is productive in the making of human beings of all sorts, not just neoliberal subjects who serve the demands of the market, and considering not just the adult student subject. If students' asking the question you asked me continues to be possible, we have

focused only on students as the future worker rather than the present student subject for whom literacy could be more than a means to enter a career. It could be a means to imagining and creating a life.

Thank you for asking me the question, Madison. I suspect I learned more about teaching from trying to answer it than you learned about reading and writing when you were in my class. I do hope, though, that you think back on our time learning together not as a compulsory repetitive exercise but as time well spent.

Yours truly,

Amy Davis Sanford

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